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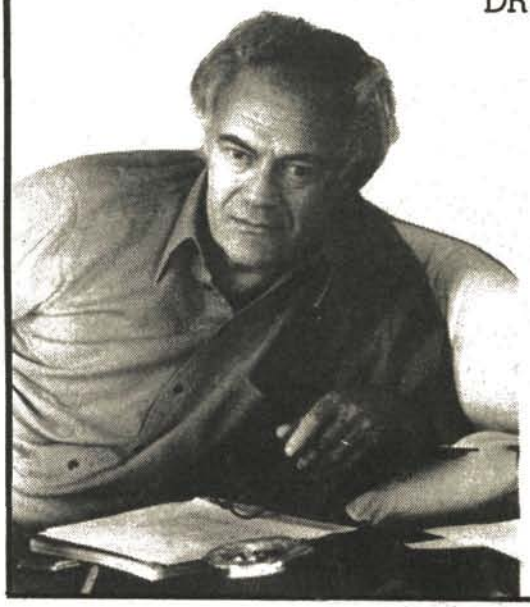

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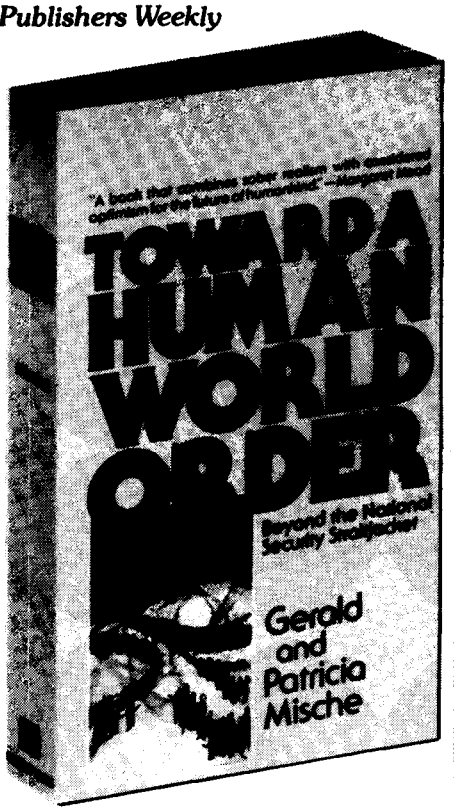

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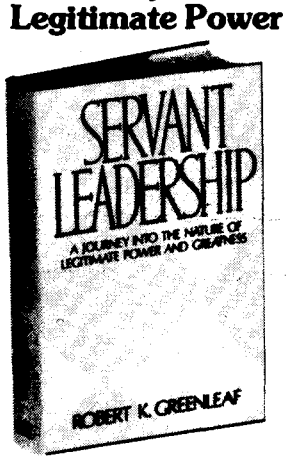

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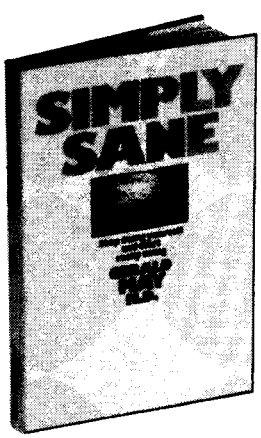

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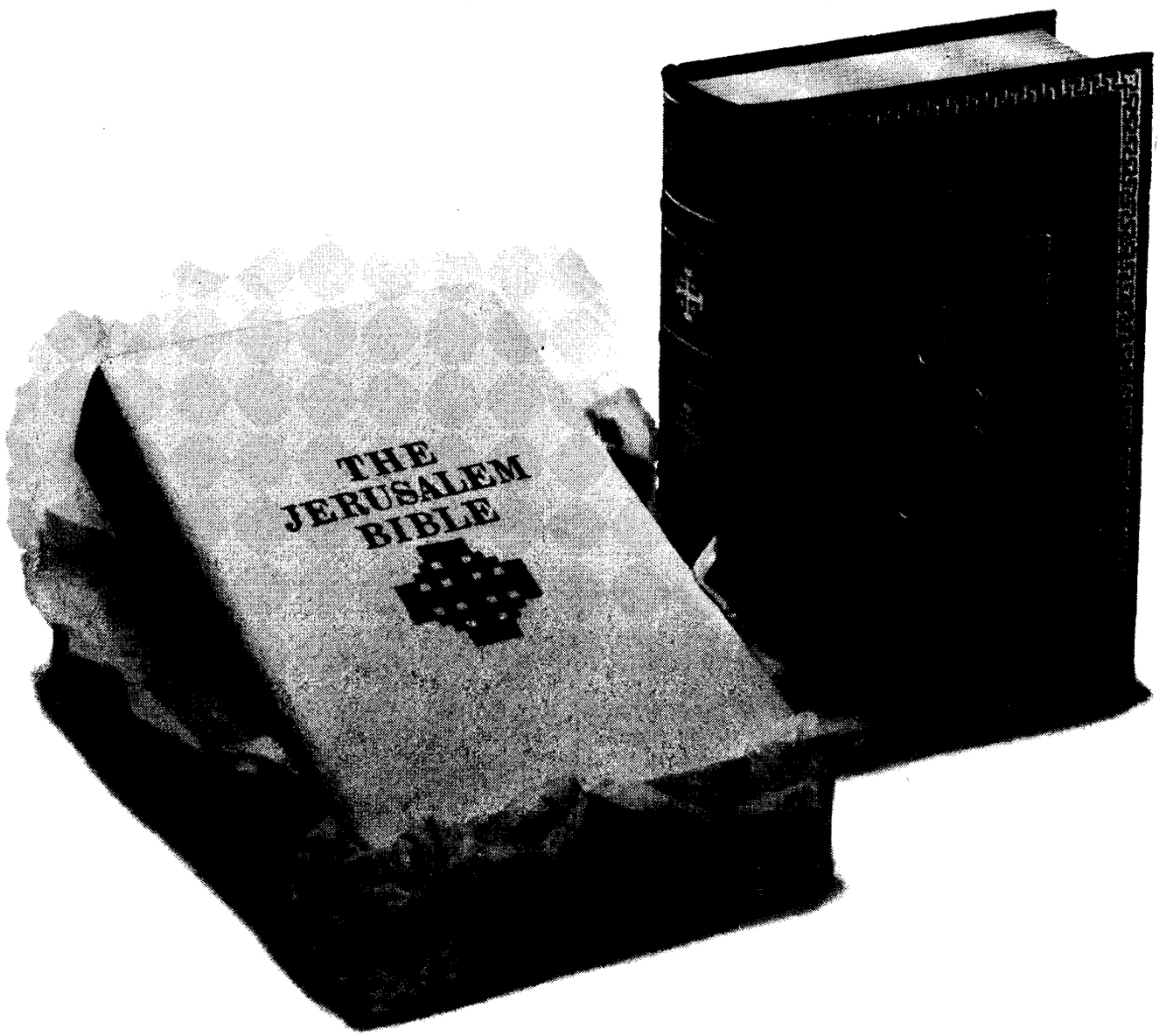

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NEWS & VIEWS

Robert Lowell

In his perceptive appreciation of Robert Lowell in the *Village Voice* a few weeks after Lowell's sudden death last Sept. 12, Tim Mayer recalled an exchange between the poet and a Catholic friend which took place in a hospital where Lowell was a patient after one of his breakdowns.

Lowell wanted to know from the friend just what he thought the Apostle Paul was driving at when he spoke of his "thorn in the flesh." The friend replied that the passage was generally taken to be a reference to sexuality. Lowell shook his head. "I think it means ambition," he said—and for Lowell, it did, said Mayer.

Mayer was a student of Lowell's at Harvard, and he saw in Lowell dimensions of Catholicism that escaped others. From Mayer's point of view, it is not surprising that Lowell's question about the "thorn in the flesh" should have been posed to a Catholic. He practiced Catholicism for only a few years, Mayer noted, but he "continued to think about it."

Mayer is right, and it is one reason why those who knew Lowell intimately from his Catholic years, when he was working at Sheed & Ward and writing for *Commonweal*, may find a mite abrupt John Druska's handling of Lowell's Catholicism in his piece appearing elsewhere in this issue.

Lowell entered the Catholic Church in 1940, the year he graduated from Kenyon College, and was a member of that small band of Catholic pacifists—J.F. Powers, Gordon Zahn, etc.—who took a conscientious-objector's position on World War II and went to jail for their witness. He had actually tried to enlist in the service, but without success. The indiscriminate bombing was a factor that eventually turned Lowell pacifist.

In jail he is said to have elicited vast admiration for the courage of that witness, the more so since he was virtually abandoned by the new Church to which he had converted. The American Catholic Church, under the nationalistic leadership of Cardinal Spellman, looked on the war almost as a holy mission.

Lowell remained a Catholic until the latter 1940s, and during that time appeared several times in *Commonweal* as a poet and reviewer. Two of the poems, most representative of Lowell's Catholic period, are reprinted on page 786.

As reviewer, he seized on some new verses of Thomas Merton in 1945 to wonder "why the last 40 years of the Catholic literary revival, which have seen the prose of Chesterton, Dawson and Waugh, have produced nothing as lasting as the light verses of Belloc."

Lowell wasn't making the observation to inflate Merton, a person he of course admired. He candidly ranked Merton as "a modest, not altogether satisfactory minor poet," but nevertheless "the most promising of our American Catholic poets and, possibly, the most consequential Catholic poet to write in English since the death of Francis Thompson."

Again, the Catholic context.

Nothing of the foregoing is written down in order to reappropriate Robert Lowell. He *renounced* Catholicism, to use the *New York Times'* verb, but obviously it was a gentle renunciation. I shared a picket line with him once in the '60s outside UN Headquarters, and he was full of affectionate questions about *Commonweal* and the old scene. Funny, but I remember the questions and not the issue that brought us there. It wasn't Vietnam, although Lowell was an antiwar activist. Maybe it was Biafra and the frightful slaughter that attended its attempt at independence from Nigeria.

Whatever, Robert Lowell is gone. He was a good man, a great poet. And he is missed.

Sad Footnote

Lois Spear's speculations about a North Carolina death-row prisoner in the last *Commonweal* ["Capital Punishment—Or Suicide?"] had a grisly denouement.

After her article went to press, Daniel R. Webster did indeed commit suicide, slashing himself with a razor blade and leaving behind several handwritten notes and a Bible with underlined verses.

Warden Sam Garrison of Raleigh's Central Prison, a recipient of one of the notes, said Webster "had prayed, had communicated with God, and decided to take this way out." The underscored Bible verses, he added, were intended to justify Webster's action.

Webster, it will be recalled from Lois Spear's article, murdered his wife, confessed, asked for and was granted the death penalty. Several civic groups, however, moved to block the execution through court action and the persuading of public opinion that capital punishment laws actually induced criminal conduct in certain types; specifically, in disturbed persons who may be tempted to commit murder to fulfill their own death wishes.

In other words, death-penalty statutes become as "contracts," guaranteeing to anyone who wants to commit suicide, but who hasn't the nerve, that the state will step in and perform the suicide for him.

It's the Gary Gilmore syndrome, and Webster was in fact fascinated by Gilmore, even to the point of taunting his jury to give him the death sentence.

The theory linking commission of a capital offense to a personal death wish is an old one, as Lois Spear noted.

Where the theorizing broke down in Webster's case is that he did after all have the nerve to do what he wanted the state to do.

It's a sad, tragic footnote to a compassionate article and serious human problem, still.

John McNeill

Another footnote to another *Commonweal* article: Dan Berrigan's piece in this issue on fellow Jesuit Father John McNeill. As it goes to the printer comes word that 12 well-known Catholic theologians have charged the Vatican's doctrinal congregation with a flagrant disregard of due process in prohibiting McNeil from speaking on sexual ethics.

The 12 are: Sister Elizabeth Carroll, RSM, Sister Margaret Farley, RSM, Dr. Daniel Maguire, Dr. Marjorie Maguire, Father Richard McBrien, Father Richard McCormick, S.J., Dr. Harry McSorley, Father Christopher Mooney, S.J., Brother Gabriel Moran, FSC, Dr. Gregory Baum, Father Charles Curran, Father Robert Springer, S.J.

"If anything," their statement says, "the Church is called upon to surpass the measure of justice available in civil society." In the case of John McNeill, they comment, the standard norms of justice have been "ignored."

The 12 have requested a meeting with the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Doctrine "to discuss this serious breach of justice and its redress."

Odds and Ends

— A British Baptist minister, after a visit to Miami, has suggested that British football adopt an American football custom: appoint team chaplains. Like they say, the team that prays together beats the spread.

JOHN DEEDY

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CORRESPONDENCE

Furthermore . . .

Milwaukee Wisc.

To the Editors: Thank you for including the letter of Pastor Richard Miles in the Oct. 28 issue of *Commonweal.*

I share his . . . "dismay by the apparent disregard for the person of a brother in Christ" (re: Mr. Novak).

It is refreshing and consoling, to say the least, that amid all the criticism pro and con for just about everything that fills the printed pages today, someone is brave enough to remind us that courtesy, gentleness, kindness, and brotherly love still have a place in the publishing world of today. I am sure that there are many who share his sentiments, but have left them unexpressed.

I hope and pray that God blesses in a special way the work of Pastor Miles.

SISTER EMILY CLEARY, OSF

Claremont, Calif.

To the Editors: I have read with interest, as I always do, your editorial for October 28 entitled "Economic Woes." Indeed those woes are deep and chronic. It is, I believe, beyond reason to expect the kind of monopoly-ridden capitalism, which we have allowed to develop in the United States, to save itself even with massive governmental help. In the face of continued price inflation, largely brought about by monopolistic pricing, it is now proposed that increasing government deficits be incurred in order to stimulate a sluggish economy. The root cause of those deficits is that the consumers of the nation cannot sustain an adequate market for monopoly-rigged prices. Nor can we expect monopolies in the fields of energy, automobiles or elsewhere to pursue any other policy than that of maximizing profits. If we are ever to meet human needs adequately, or to develop clean sources of energy, it will have to be done through the effective competition of publicly and cooperatively owned enterprises, capable of curbing the power of existing monopolies. JERRY VOORHIS

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AMERICAN JEWS AND MR. CARTER

Walter Cronkite won plaudits for his role in the Sadat-Begin meeting. So too did the recently departed Henry Kissinger, presumably for having initiated shuttle diplomacy in the Mid East. But did President Jimmy Carter get any credit, particularly among American Jews, where he badly needs it? The way things have been shaping up for Carter, he might be excused for thinking he will be associated with the Sadat initiative only if it turns out disastrously. In recent months there has been a growing alarm in the American Jewish community about U.S. Mid East policy and a growing suspicion that the Carter administration is not Israel's true friend. American Jews are increasingly upset at what they see as consistent pressure by the United States on Israel to make concessions to the Arabs, particularly to the Palestinians, and they were especially alarmed at the joint U.S.-Soviet statement which seemed to signal the reentry of the U.S.S.R. into Middle Eastern diplomacy. The question of P.L.O. participation at Geneva and a possible Palestinian state is extremely vexing to supporters of Israel in this country, and a head-to-head confrontation with the Carter administration on the whole question of current Mid East policy is very possible. At the heart of this potential confrontation is the suspicion in American Jewish circles that the administration is so anxious to appease the Arab oil nations that it would sacrifice Israel's vital interests in the process.

For President Carter the political consequences of such a falling-out would be severe, and administration officials are laboring mightily to avert it. A poll taken before the Sadat trip indicates that more than half of all Americans who follow Mid Eastern affairs support Mr. Carter's policies;

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at the same time about an equal number feel the U.S. should give its "strongest support to Israel, even if it means risking an Arab oil boycott." Only 27 percent of those interviewed in the *New York Times*-CBS Poll took the opposite view—that the U.S. should "pay more attention to the demands of the Arabs even if it means antagonizing Israel." And a study published in *Commentary* indicates that a confrontation on Mid East policy would draw strong political opposition to Mr. Carter from a significant cross section of American society, with those "fervently dedicated" to the survival of Israel—Jews and non-Jews—making up about 27 percent of the American electorate. This would make them numerous enough to constitute a veto group in national politics, and such opposition would have a "devastating effect" on Carter's chances for reelection.

This is a touchy issue, but whatever credit or blame accrues as a result of the Sadat trip, non-Jewish Americans should not allow it to become a divisive factor in our national life. Certainly American Jews by and large tend to have intense sympathy for Israel and why not? Italian Americans, German Americans, Polish Americans, Ukranian Americans—all have strong feelings for their people's original homeland. Witness the money presently flowing to Northern Ireland from Americans of Irish descent. There is no reason American Jews should not have similar feelings about Israel, and without any charges of dual loyalty being raised, especially if Israel's survival seems to be at stake.

But this is precisely the rub. American Jews feel increasingly that the Carter policy is in fact inimical to Israel, and there is therefore a strong tendency among American Jewish spokesmen to close ranks and avoid any internal dissent on issues involving Israel. On the West Bank, for instance, the Begin government seems intent on increasing the number of Jewish settlements on the land won from Jordanian control in 1967, apparently on the Begin thesis that such land is not occupied but liberated. This policy in turn led to a resolution in the General Assembly of the United Nations censuring Israel and calling the actions illegal and an obstruction to peace efforts. The United States abstained; only Israel voted against the resolution which was approved by 131 votes. Even granting the low esteem in which the UN is held these days, such a verdict of world public opinion cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, spokesmen for the American Jewish community have not criticized the Begin policy on this matter, and this is no doubt because of their conviction that the Mid East policies of the Carter administration constitute a threat to Israel's security and well-being. When that is the case, no one feels free to criticize Israeli policy.

The Carter people have tried to present their case to American Jews. Prior to the Sadat trip, Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance explained administration policy to a closed meeting of American Jewish leaders, and before the American Jewish Congress Andrew Young defended President Carter's role as an "honest broker" in the Mid East, insisting that administration policies would in fact bolster Israel's security. And President Carter made his own effort, pleading with Jewish leaders that "intemperance or partisanship" should not be allowed to thwart what might be "the best opportunity for a permanent Middle East peace settlement in our lifetime." In the course of that speech Mr. Carter made it clear that he would not bend under pro-Israel pressure; indeed, he suggested that too fervent support of some Israeli positions might harm Israel by hamstringing negotiations. There matters stood until the Sadat trip. If that venture produces a breakthrough in the Mid East, we will be in a whole new ball game. But if the Sadat trip does not produce striking results, the relationship of Mr. Carter and American Jews is likely to remain strained. Wherever the blame should lie, the fact is that so far the administration has failed completely to sell its case to the American Jewish community.

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FROM ROME

A DISPLAY OF UNITY

"Catechesis is a difficult word," Bishop Raymond Lucker admitted when asked by reporters in Rome why this year's synod failed to fire the imagination of the general public. This year's theme, chosen by the Pope after a series of consultations with the Episcopal Conferences, was: Catechesis of Our Day with Sepcial Reference to Children and Youth.

"They could have chosen the words *religious education*, but that implies classroom teaching. The word in English—*catechism*—brings to people's mind the idea of a book. Theology is only one part of the question. The words *religious studies* give the idea of an objective approach rather than a commitment to religious life. *Catechesis*, on the other hand, is a Greek word that conveys the idea that we are concerned with all of those things that go into making a modern Christian," he explained.

Bishop Lucker, of New Ulm, Minnesota, was among the more than 200 bishops, cardinals, patriarchs and religious superiors called to Rome to discuss "all those

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things that go into making a modern Christian" at the fifth Bishops' Synod held September 30-October 29 in the Vatican. Initiated by Vatican II to provide more contact between the Pope and the bishops around the world, the special body has been dubbed by the secular press the "Parliament" of the church. This year some even hinted that it was a sort of pre-Conclave in which the cardinals, given the advanced age of Pope Paul, would be exchanging views on the nomination of the next Pope. "Pure fantasy," retorted the official Vatican organ *L'Osservatore Romano.*

The Synod is nevertheless the most "democratic" ecclesiastical institution and as such is a good barometer for testing the changing moods and situations of the various national churches throughout the world. The fact that this year's Synod—unlike the previous sessions which were marked by in-fighting and tension—was, as Canadian Bishop Emmett Carter put it, "the most peaceful that we have had" is in itself indicative of a general sentiment of reconciliation. The Indian Cardinal Lawrence Trevor Picachy, who headed the Commission for Controversies, admitted he was unemployed during the entire month-long Synod. "One might ask," concluded Cardinal Sebastiano Baggio of the Curia Romana, "if after the agitation of post-Vatican II this Synod doesn't signal a new phase in the life of the church."

Despite the display of unity shown at the Synod—a document circulated at the beginning of the session which gave a panoramic view of the church's activities since the last Synod in 1974 made a direct appeal to Lefebvre to return to the fold—the meeting of bishops was not without its contrasts. Rather than internal divisions, however, the bishops addressed themselves to a different sort of "tension"—the difficulties the church faces in a contemporary society that is often indifferent or even hostile to religious sentiment. The catechetical mission meets up with obstacles not only in those countries where religious liberty is restricted, but also in those nations where materialism and consumerism predominate. "In many nations due to the evolution of the society religious activity has been given a marginal role," the bishops lamented in their final document, "A Message to the People of God."

Contrasts were also apparent in the different cultural heritages of the bishops present. The Africans, pointing to the importance of the community experience, stressed the need to use local traditions in the teaching of the faith. "A truly local church will emerge from the use of a life-centered catechesis that will make it possible for the Gospel Message to be rooted in the lives of our African people," said Cardinal Maurice Otunga, archbishop of Nairobi. "One Sunday, for example, a missionary priest at the Tabaka Mission in Kisii read out the Gospel of the Good Samaritan. The Kisii tribe borders with the Maasai tribe. For centuries these two tribes have been at war, killing each other and taking away cattle from each other. On this particular Sunday the priest told the Kisii that their neighbor in the Gospel was the Maasai. The whole church, old and young, women and men, spontaneously reacted with one expression: 'KAI, KAI' which means, 'Impossible, impossible.' However they got the message which they have never forgotten."

Cardinal Lawrence Trevor Picachy, archbishop of Calcutta, pointed to the number of Christians both in the East and the West who are attracted to the religions of Asia which are based on contemplation and interior peace. He warned that the church must re-examine its lifestyle if it is to have any impact on a subcontinent that is overwhelmed by misery. Citing such figures as Jean Vanier and Mother Theresa of Calcutta, who have "succeeded to a certain extent in awakening the conscience of the world," the Indian cardinal concluded, "We have a long way to go. The fact is that poverty is not news that makes headlines."

While the church is struggling to establish Christianity in the Third World amid poverty and cultural diversity, the bishops from the affluent nations of the West spoke of obstacles of another sort: how to teach the faith in an increasingly secularized society where religious values are drowned in a sea of consumerism. "Who is determining our culture?" asked Bishop Lucker. "The mass media, movie stars, Las Vegas and Johnny Carson? It's this that disturbs me."

In the socialist countries where religious practice is often discouraged, the church faces still another challenge: how to compete with an ideology that stresses some of the same social values as Christianity (justice, anti-consumerism, a community spirit, etc.), but promotes a non-religious conception of the world. In this area of the world, the rigid opposition of the past is giving way to a more realistic approach of co-existence for both sides. Pointing out that the church in Vietnam had in the past been accused of being linked with imperialism, the bishop of Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Nguyen Van Binh, emphasized the need for Vietnamese Catholics to collaborate with the new government: "The main goal of the regime is to unite all citizens in the building of a new society. The Vietnamese Catholics, refusing to live in a ghetto, do not want to be left out of this effort."

Catechesis and poverty. Catechesis and consumerism. Catechesis and Marxism. In each part of the world the church must take into account the social, political and cultural conditions in which it operates. If a single theme can be found in the weeks of speeches, discussions and documents of this year's synod it is this: in order to promote "all those things that go into making a modern Christian," the church must confront the modern world with all its competing ideologies. "In a situation of diversity and pluralism, the Christian

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shouldn't be afraid," the bishops concluded in their final message. "With the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Christian can be, according to the word of the Apostle, 'strong in the faith.' The authentic opening of the spirit presupposes and demands a clear and mature consciousness of one's own identity which is necessary for witness and mission."

MARGO HAMMOND

(Margo Hammond, a frequent contributor, is an American journalist working in Rome.)

WASHINGTON REPORT

THE JOB ON JOBS

That HEW building at the foot of Capitol Hill with a view of the skating rink one way and of the city's most astonishing freeway access complex on the other may be no great shakes as architecture—although well above the Federal mean around here—but it is named for Hubert Horatio Humphrey and that's a good thing. Meanwhile, in far Minnesota, the Hubert H. Humphrey political science institute is in far too early a stage for anyone to know whether it will ever amount to anything or not, but that's a good thing, too.

The reason both those product-pending projects are good things is that they are memorials to one of the last top liberals in government, a remarkable man any way you look at him, and while one may be dubious about the HEW architecture or reserved about the political science institute, the other available memorial is the Humphrey-Hawkins Bill and you don't need reservation or dubiety about that: whether you like Humphrey and his politics, or hate both with the gem-like flame intensity of James Jackson Kilpatrick, you have to admit that Humphrey is something. Humphrey-Hawkins ain't nothing.

There are people on the Hill who believe it never was much and you can make the case that it never was as much as was needed to achieve something more nearly approaching full employment than anything we are likely to achieve in the next few years. Those people say the new bill is not only watered down, which everybody says, but that it is watered down water. They may be right, but, however inadequate, the original Humphrey-Hawkins did something; the new one, arrived at through weeks of negotiating everything away to the fiscally conservative Carter administration, does nothing. It is a kind of joint resolution, not joint of the two Houses of Congress, but joint of the Legislative and Executive Branches, that they all believe everybody ought to have a job and they sure wish good luck to anybody looking for one.

Not to denigrate Rep. Augustus F. Hawkins of California in the least—he did co-sponsor a bill that meant at least a little help for the unemployed—in the Carterized version the "Hawkins" seems really to stand for Sadie Hawkins: the Joint Resolution encourages the unemployed to go run after jobs just as Sadie Hawkins Day used to encourage single ladies to run after Dogpatch's determined bachelors, with the difference, of course, that there were a lot more bachelors per Dogpatch maiden lady than there are jobs per job-seeker.

We have settled into what looks like a permanent seven percent unemployment rate. What is lacking in the Carter-Humphrey-Hawkins is any plan at all to get that down to six, let alone the three/four the bill proclaims as a national goal. The original may not have been the boldest job plan anyone has come up with—offhand, I can think of two both bolder and more imaginative—but it did place the government as employer of last resort if all else fails. Now, there is nothing as last resort if all else fails as all else has stubbornly continued to do for some years now. If all else fails, it fails, but we wish you well, pal, in your daily round of workplaces overstaffed with workers. Write if you find work.

The classic theory of unemployment is that it keeps inflation down, but of course it is not working like that at all and it's time we stopped pretending it does work like that. The classic theory was that a pool of the unemployed kept the employed from getting too uppity. It was like a whiff of grapeshot or a salutary hanging "to encourage the others." The workers, leaving the factory gate and seeing the non-workers scraping the garbage cans, thought, there but for the grace of Mr. Gotrox go I so I'd better go easy on Gotrox, perhaps offer to take a cut.

That actually did work when the labor market was literally a kind of auction: How many will work for 20 cents a day? How many for 30 and so on until the crew was complete. Between union contracts on the one hand and minimum wage laws on the other, the labor market has not worked that way in a long time and even the wildest dreams of the deceptively named Right-to-work Committee don't really see that happy state returning. You could have 50 percent unemployment and those who did have jobs would still be paid at least the minimum established by law and in most cases the much higher minimum established by contract. So the Gotroxes of this world really have nothing to lose by letting people work for the government if they can't find work elsewhere. The defense line, manned by Carter,

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is really symbolic, probably having to do with the specter of socialism.

Yet the odd thing is the government has been into providing jobs for a long time and its doing so in one big area is regularly lauded by lots of the people who fear the same thing if done for the unemployed. That area, of course, is military spending. Whenever the Joint Chiefs' procurement officers and their once and future employer-corporations come up with some new, incredibly expensive miracle weapon, the lack of which will insure the landing of the Russians in Bismarck, North Dakota, Tuesday at noon, the ultimate argument is that the thing will create jobs. What are you, against employment?, it is regularly asked of citizens and congressmen expressing doubt about the latest high-priced whiz-bang. The final push for the B-1 was based on distributing jobs around the country in such a manner that practically every congressman of consequence got at least some for his district. In that instance, almost alone, it didn't work, but it is time we realized that, thanks to the arms merchants, this country has long been committed to government spending to provide jobs. Traditionally, we provide the jobs in order to get the whiz-bang and thus save Pocatello from the Red Army, but the whiz-bang finally flies on the jobs argument. Hence, the government is, and for a long time has been, in the job business. Surely it is time we put it on a rational basis, figured out how to get the jobs without the whiz-bangs and use the money saved to get enough jobs to go around.

Well, it may surely be time we did that, but we surely aren't going to do it the way things look now. How could we? Our national thinking at the moment seems to be that the only legitimate way for the government to create jobs for people is through the trickle down theory in general and specifically through handing billions to the weapons merchants so they can pass much of the money on to workers, with normal breakage or a little more than normal going to the merchants and their bankers. If we really want a jobs policy, therefore, we should program procurement officers, arms merchants and big bankers into it. We can easily legislate, for example, that for every unemployed person hired by the government, David Rockefeller gets a hundred smackers. It's not that he needs the money, it's just that he and many like him feel that nothing is really legit in this country unless he and those like him get a cut. It's something like running a crap game; naturally you don't want some two-bit rival like the United States government operating its own down the street. The rival can operate, but only if the original man gets his established cut.

Similarly, the jobs program could as easily be run by the arms merchants as by anyone else. Let Lockheed and Northrop bid on leaf-raking in the South Bronx—more accurately, no doubt, let them decide between themselves which one will put in the "low" bid this time—and you'll be amazed at the speed with which congressmen, Pentagonians, even the Carter administration will rally round the program to end unemployment.

As for procurement officers, let's say that for every thousand unemployed put to work, five procurement officers get a free duck hunt on the Eastern Shore. If this scheme seems fanciful, it is much less so than expecting Carter-Humphrey-Hawkins to get anyone a job.

FRANK GETLEIN

FREDERICK MORGAN

SUSPIRIA

Take them, death—take
whoever belongs to you:
your likeness is stamped
inwardly, on the plasm.

The mass of flesh and bone
absorbs into the soil;
consciousness, too, is renewed,
pale in its billion cells.

The single life blossoms,
fades, drops to the earth,
as the tree lives on in the dream
by which it is remembered.

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THE LEVELING OF JOHN McNEILL

DANIEL BERRIGAN

Silencing a man and a book

While a passionate age storms ahead, setting up new things and tearing down old, raising and demolishing as it goes, a reflective and passionless age does exactly the contrary. It hinders and stifles all action. It levels. . . .

Enthusiasm may indeed end in disaster, but leveling is eo ipso the destruction of the individual. No age, and therefore not the present age, can bring the scepticism of that process to a halt. For as soon as it tries, the law of the leveling process is again brought into play. Leveling can only be halted by the individual attaining the religious courage which springs from his individual religious solitude. —*Kierkegaard: The Present Age*

The episode had all the whacked out improbability of a grade C dog day movie. Indeed, a furious and illiterate enemy of Rome could have done no worse. Take one learned and passionate Jesuit out on a limb, take an obscure Roman Cardinal armed with a snicker snee; interpose one embattled Jesuit General, hiking up, abetting said Cardinal. Down comes limb, Jesuit, passion and all.

We thought really, we had done with all that. Vatican II had solemnized the resolve Pope John had given over his short and happy life to the prospect. Never again secret character assassinations secretly arrived at, no more suffocations, immurations, exiles, dismissals, enforced silencings, no more midnight burials at crossroads, no more stakes through the heart of prophetic purpose. We had done with all that. We were to become, shortly and radically, a new sort of spectacle unto the world. Behold, in midst no more macho or macha. Jew or gentile, homo or hetero. One holy, indivisible, color blind, age blind, sex blind. Authority in service, symbol and reality, rite and follow through, one seamless conscience, one body of love.

The documents went bravely about it, they were a raiment of poverty decked in ribbons for a holiday, our baptismal robe. We would do what we had purported to do, it was simple as that. The will was the grace, the grace blessed the performance. We were canceling out the evil in our history, recovering from blindness, taking a new turn, indeed rising from the dead. The bible was coming alive in us. Once and for all, the new community was to be born, sprung, mature and purposeful, ready for passion and action in the world.

It was a little like the heady romanticism that bubbled up in American society in the '60s. Everything was possible to us, even a reborn culture; even (God help us) the rebirth of defunct political arrangements. We would turn everything over, we would turn out all the rascals, we would begin anew.

Such a fever of anticipated triumph! it swept everything before it—for awhile. It lived along the wave like an ecstatic surfer. Impossible to fail, only watch us!

Alas, the wave subsided, the surfer went under, head over heels. In Kierkegaard's phrase, the Passionate Age was succeeded by the Great Leveler.

A new tactic is thereupon called for. Mere prudence, a sense of survival, dictate that in the age of leveling, one keep a low profile. Lest one be leveled. The principle is honored in anthropology, under some rubric like "The Law of Survival." The same law has much to say to experts in other fields. (Not to speak of simple

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folk who would prefer by and large, to survive until sundown.) Money-makers know how to lie low, when a bullish market goes sluggish. Politicians learn the difference between an open and an off season on speaking up, the difference between a good but bootless issue versus a juicy if spurious one; when to push and pull, when to rock gently with the grain. Roman churchmen? they are masters of the shifts and tides of this world. Their fifth gospel, like a fifth wheel, is always ready, in case, just in case. (The other four may or may not do, one cannot be sure.) This one is named Sweet Reason. Or The Lesser Evil. Or The Greater Good. In any case, Assembled in Italy.

The point of all this is to suggest a contrast. On the one hand, the Levelers. On the other, the out of tune, out of joint, out of step character named by Kierkegaard, 'the religious individual.' This one has no sense of right timing, cannot read traffic signs, has indeed no interest in reading them, is utterly and incurably irrelevant (to all but one thing), speaks up when everyone urges equivocal prudence, is silent in the midst of hot contention, has no authority beyond the useless currency of human concern. He (she) has a simple project in the world, a project which arose from walking in the world and observing events there. It might be put like this; to save or aid one other person, or a few. The project of course makes little sense in an age leveled off to hot crowds and shifty crowd-pleasers.

In any case, our religious individual is the very opposite of a stereotype, even of a stereotype Jesuit. That vocation, peculiar in nature, is popularly supposed to call one out of the crowd to become a crowd-pleaser. (Albeit capable of sternness at times, with a nice critical edge.) This character, it is said, niftily redeems the times by going with the times, not against them; an optimist to the core, a 'redemptive' optimist, just to get the language straight. What this comes down to, is an old skill first outlined by Socrates; a Jesuit, they say, can make the worse argument appear the better, whenever the worse argument redounds to a measure of corporate benefit. (What's good for one of Ours is good for all of Ours.) He has, moreover, no hesitation in embracing the culturally meretricious. (Even the enemy would admit this is rare; though the Jesuits might admit it is too unrare for comfort.) The tactic here being political clout in harness to rampageous ego, as in the case of McLaughlin huckstering Nixon's war. Or perhaps a silly enchantment with mass media frenzy, as in the concocters of The Exorcist. But these, I am relieved to report, are instances of Ours at their determined worst. And when we are lucky, as in the outcome of the above lamentable grotesqueries, the agents do their little (or large) worst, and pass from the scene, chastened or defiant as the case may be, but on their own.

The stereotype is the exception in real life. And this is what gives us hope; there are Jesuits and Jesuits. There are Enthusiasts and Levelers, there are Icemen and Firemen, Indians and Chiefs, Manicurists and Sore Thumbs.

The Sore Thumb

The latter is the burden of these reflections. For it is the Sore Thumb that tells us the condition of the body. And to that degree, the pain of one member is to the honor of all, a sign to be winced at. We have had in these last unamiable years, some ten thumbs on our two American hands; all of them both clumsy and sore, a redundancy of pain. Something is indeed wrong; but then, at least it is given us to know it, and with a vengeance.

One Jesuit lately held up his pain (and ours) before the befuddled public gaze; a gaze which quickly, in official eye sockets, has darkened with horror. Consider the case. A Doctor of Philosophy in the time-honored mold, teacher, writer, counselor. To this point, no pain; all well and good. I met John McNeill years ago, in Europe. He was undergoing the grueling obstacle race *honoris causa* at Louvain. Our paths crossed briefly, as I recall in Paris. We got on well. He was amiable and alive in the mind, certainly we were both great innocents, with the dreadful messy uncharted future lying out there, and we bemused, thinking our lives would go straight as the arrow of God's (purported) will; safe, sound, bell, book, candle, cassock, rule, long black line, classroom, rec room, womb to tomb security.

It's all gone, for good; in more senses than one. Now he's grizzled as Zero Mostel; he has the look we all wear, except for a few chic hangers-on, the look of bare survivors, a wreck that went under like a stone. We're surprising to ourselves, we don't know how we made it ashore, couldn't tell if asked. John is unacceptable in his field, ethics, to any Catholic university in the land, Jesuits included. I'm somewhat less immediately notorious, the University of Detroit brought me in for one semester two years ago. But the security, the credit cards, the sound ID, went down in the catastrophe referred to above. Now we live by our wits, so to speak. (I forgot to ask John if the figure would fit him; as for myself, a beneficiary of Cosmic Welfare, I live off the universe, an edgy way, never a dull moment.)

In the matter of John McNeill, I have pursued all available documents. I can only report they are not much, qualitatively speaking. Letters from Rome, in this case as in the preceding centuries of decrying and decreeing, are not exactly Star Wars for scintillation or Kojak for bite. They are more like, gustatorially speaking, last week's omelet; cold but wholesome, with a cross cut into their flab to render them less indigestible. You realize why Romans never need machines to turn

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out their letters, they have the services of ecclesiastics who write as well, or as badly as machines, but less expensively. Besides, what machines would give that nice inhuman turn of a blade which has, so to speak, a cross on its hilt; and therefore blesses while it wounds —wounds against justice, against charity, against common sense, against reason itself? The letters, to coin a cliché, run the gamut. The gamut is predictably narrow. One does not write from Rome in the ordinary course of things, to express jubilation, or thanks for a work well done, or a poem turned, or a jail sentence survived; not for an exile rescinded, a Roman crime admitted and atoned. Such functions do not befit the functionary. No, in every case the message and the media are more purgatorial; they have the quality of fire to the touch. They urge repentance, submission, silence, withdrawal, the conduct generally befitting repentant children snatched by adult hands from lapse or lunacy.

This is somewhat the tone of the McNeill file. It should be added in justice that the hand of Father General Arrupe is generally not equal to his task. His humanity breaks through, in ways we have seen before, on happier occasions. One has a sense he writes such letters with two-thirds or even half a heart, that in such matters as lie in contention here, he has been pushed to the wall, and acts under duress. Uncommon courage, uncommon travail. In a good time, a good man may be both adroit and easefully large of spirit; but Arrupe's heroism is of a sterner cast, harder won. He lives in a time of leveling, he salvages what he can. He has moreover been nearly leveled himself on several occasions, living as he does under the gun sights of the Roman curia.

But to resume. Bizarre goings on are transpiring, not isolated indeed, but in the midst of a crazified culture and time; America, now. The Jesuit McNeill, on the threshhold of distinction, an expert in ethics, a man well loved, held in respect—such a one begins speaking up on behalf of—homosexuals. Not content with keeping closet matters where in decency they belong, and keeping such people where they belong, and urging contentment with their lunatic lot—no, he refuses that way, which is the time-honored way, the way the church has invariably gone, so that matters that belong in the light may stand in the light, and other unlovely barely mentionable matters may dwell where fate (correction; God's will) assigns them; in the shadow. This Jesuit refuses to follow that way. He takes a few of these people by the hand, and leads them into the very center of the circle, the circle let us say, of worship, of brother- and sisterhood. He introduces them to other Christians, he blesses them, shrives them, communicates them, just like the others. Everything is seemly and normal and above board. In Christ, he says, there is neither hetero nor homo, but one Body, His own.

Now this activity approaches the dangerous, and some people wince, and sounds of disaffection are heard. John seems not to hear them. If he does hear them, he grants them no attention. He is, as I suggested, one of Kierkegaard's *enfants terribles*, a "religious individual," out of tune, out of step. He has held a hand in his own, has sensed human suffering, has witnessed injustice, psychic destruction, stigma, rejection. He takes the measure of the world, the measure of church teaching, the measure of his own soul, from there. And so he walks from there, one step further. It is not that he is ignorant, that he does not know he is on thin ice. Rather he makes small account of such things; or at least (there is no point in creating a fiction here, a human without fear) he makes less account of personal danger than of the untended and unmerited suffering which his 'prudence' would only worsen.

He takes another step. He does a classic thing, which a few Jesuits have done for centuries, in such circumstances. He puts to work his skills and discipline and conscience. (The latter is the rub, he is not the typical bankrupt academic, he is incapable of the betrayal of silence.) He sets to work at a thorny, all but untouchable, urgent human issue. In 1970, for the *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, McNeill wrote three watershed articles entitled, "The Christian Male Homosexual." The unsayable was said, the ghosts were out of the closet.

He was encouraged to expand his ideas in a book. He did so, and duly submitted the manuscript to the scrutiny of superiors. So far, simple. But what followed is probably one of the most extended eking out of reluctant approbation in all the slow turning of Roman mills. In those months and years, I saw a new side of McNeill, the strength of absolutely marmoreal patience. To this day, I am trying to absorb and understand it. He waited, he questioned, he was rebuffed, he waited, once more he was told to wait, he was counseled to be patient by millennial-minded authorities. His manuscript was scrutinized by enough experts to sanitize the Augean stables. Their fine tooth comb declared him again and again tick free, lice free, dandruff free; gnat or camel, they could find nothing to stick at. Through it all he was unfailingly, exasperatingly courteous, a gentleman *ad unguem*. I watched and marveled and began to think the Pelagians wrong. Here was a Jesuit who escaped the lamentable common fate, when our garden became a spoiled playground. Where was his rancor, exasperation, his coil and recoil, the sweat and bruises we all bear into the public arena?

More. While he waited and waited for a Roman decision on his manuscript, McNeill's patience was an uncommonly active virtue. The organization "Dignity," which he helped found for homosexual Catholics, grew to some 56 chapters in as many cities. And when his book was finally cleared, and *The Church and the Homo-*

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sexual appeared bearing its croix de guerre, the *Imprimi Potest*, McNeill took to the road like a shot. He visited some thirty cities speaking on behalf of gays, advancing the thesis of his new book;

> It would appear to follow that the same moral rules apply to homosexual as to heterosexual attitudes and behavior. Those that are responsible, respectful, loving and truly promotive of the good of both parties are moral; those that are exploitive, irresponsible, disrespectful, or destructive of the true good of either party, must be judged immoral.

Which may be so, or may not. In any case, the bearing of a book or a baby into our world is in the nature of things, a beginning of trials, misadventures, ogres and angels. Not the end, by any means.

It appears that Rome was less than comforted by this successful delivery, a book that was bound to go loud and kicking into the world. We can only reconstruct events and motives here. On the one hand, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is not to be confused in method or ethos with the defunct crusher that preceded it, the Holy Office. Nor need we envision a lurking special interest; as though the Vatican had a corner on the construction of vertical coffins for uppety gays. The past suggests another direction. Simply; since the 12th century, this unmanageable question of homosexuality has been managed quite well, through a tactic of queasy silence, eyebrow raising, public and private defamation, corporal punishment, auricular confession and forgiveness, the amendment of dark minds and darker acts. Let things stand at that, forever. Let such people be. Or in the inelegant but telling phrase of one Jesuit authority in this matter, "Kiss them off."

In any case, alternately kissed and kicked by fate, McNeill and his saga are far from ended. In August, John was summoned to New York Jesuit headquarters by Father Eamon Taylor, the provincial authority. He was informed that a letter from Father General Arrupe conveyed a decision of Cardinal Seper, head of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. To wit. McNeill's book took a position contrary to the common teaching of the church; the book showed disrespect for the magisterium, appearing as it did just at the time the church had reaffirmed its position on the immorality of homosexuality; moreover, the *imprimi potest* had been issued on the supposition that the book would be restricted to the community of scholars—but in consequence of McNeill's strenuous travels and many media appearances, Catholic gays were being deluded as to their true state.

In consequence of all this, the *imprimi potest* was to be removed from future printings of the book, and McNeill was forbidden to speak henceforth on matters of sexuality or sexual ethics.

Roma locuta. Or so we heard. The Seper-Arrupe document was, as they say, "unavailable."

McNeill promptly and predictably obeyed, sending off a message to Chicago, where he was to address the opening session of the Dignity convention;

> . . . After a great deal of prayer and consultation I have personally made the decision to obey the directive. It was always my hope and dream that through my scholarship and efforts, I could make some contribution to a reconciliation of the church with the gay community, and of the gay community to the church. At this time and under these circumstances, I now judge that the best contribution I can make to that dream is by my silence. I hope by my silence to be of service both to the church which I love and the gay community with which I have become so closely identified.
>
> I hope also that my silence itself will be eloquent. I hope it will join the silence of those many theologians of pre-Vatican II, Teilhard de Chardin, John Courtney Murray, Henri de Lubac, whose obedience eventually led to their vindication. I would like my silence in some way to symbolize the

> defenseless silence through the centuries, and even today, of hundreds of thousands of gay Catholics. I am absolutely confident that this represents only a temporary setback in the cause of justice for gay Catholics and that, eventually, with God's help, the church will learn to deal openly and lovingly in dialogue with the gay community; that it will hear what the Holy Spirit has to say to the church from its gay brothers and sisters in Christ.

McNeill's response, whatever its merits, runs true to form. He refuses to play the loser or victim, to lie down on command and die. At the same time, he will not go away, thereby solving a dilemma which is not so much his as Rome's. Indeed the Great Leveler plays a sad charade, in a sad time of disaffection and ill feeling—an atmosphere which church authority, in spite of all, seeds in the air. A "time of leveling"; it demeans everyone, it stains everything.

We are indeed being leveled off. Kierkegaard's image is the opposite of a legitimate sensitive order of things, in which the proper dignity and grace of all are respected, nurtured. Leveling; not creatureliness, nor a

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befitting modesty before the universe and God. Something other indeed; a radical, abstract inversion of right order; dead principles invoked despite the cries of the living, women literally "put in their place" by a male blow; homosexuals eased into outer darkness, out of sight, out of mind. A closing of ranks, a closing of minds, a narrowing of the range of inquiry open to believers. And a warning served on others; on homosexuals who seek ordination or membership in religious orders—on all in fact, hetero, homo, or plain human who hoped, had been led to hope, that the church was becoming an advocate of victimized people.

Alas for the poor blokes that we are, and our hopes. We shall have to make our way as best we may in the mine fields, McNeill and many others, marginal to a church which itself is marginal to human hope. A marginal church, not in the Pauline sense of "unconformed to this world." To the contrary, a church all too conformed, all too powerful, all too fearful, all too prudent. That which should elevate and enhance, levels. That which should foster distinction, variety, passionate conscience, levels. That which should raise the dead, the equivalent dead, the presumed dead, the sentenced to death, the outcast, the victimized—levels. That which should confer faith and hope and charity, poisons us with bad faith, diminishes our hope to the needle's point, comes toward us small and sour of mind.

But these reflections are meant to be an act of love. I am not sure I find McNeill's response to my crude taste. It is somewhat too mystical, it takes refuge, it is not angry. I hope he is not too resigned, just as I am sure he is not hateful. But apart from all that, I honor him. Today, when every conceivable question is politicized out of its reasonable skull, he places a sure, patient, obscure sense of soul above some crude confessional tactic. I suspect his sense of history is sound, and this not merely as a tactic. I think he is unafraid of the cross.

Storming some purported barricade might win him a feverish following; his silence brings us up short, leaves us perplexed, at sea. And at sea is where we are, in any case. It is bitter to be reminded of it; that we have few landmarks; that in this matter as in so many others that have surfaced these past years, the church seems to have lost its bearings. Could the Roman officials have known that they have silenced McNeill at a most dangerous time, when homosexual rights are under fire, and domestic fanatics are tuning up for a war on deviants? One wonders, one is appalled.

And what of the homosexual community? In New York, the archdiocese has consistently opposed an ordinance that would guarantee civil rights to gays. Gays have now been served notice (even as women previously were), in terms silken or devious, that they are of no account, or of lesser account, or niggers, or irrelevant, or back pew citizens, or unfit for ministry, or sexually unfortunate, or emotionally inferior, or—. The degradation is wonderfully inventive, the intention is by now clear. Homosexuals will continue to be regarded in the church with that cute cast of the eye which signals more eloquently than a blow, that a creepy citizen has somehow gotten into the compound. An emotional apparatus is then set in motion, somewhat as though a gorgeous dish were sailing past a knot of thugs on some midtown street. You can all but hear the gears revving up.

Thus a meeting of humans is sexualized, abnormalized, inflated out of all recognition. As in a scene played under water or in outer space, exaggerated, even grotesque gestures, movements, come into play. The homosexual shakes us up, tumbles us out of this world; somewhat the way the incurably ill do, the dying, the unmentionable and marginal, all those who show us our own future, our own secrets, our own throttled humanity. How does one act normally before the "abnormal"? We hitch up our purported bumptious normality, we come on tougher than ever, more macho than ever. This is after all our church, male to the crotch, white to the real estate, pure to the very conception.

I feel like saying to John McNeill with an irony that passes expression; welcome aboard. After some twenty years of bare survival in the order and the church, one feels entitled to propound a principle—into the void, or into the west wind. To wit; there is no status in the American church worth talking about, worth tasting, worth trying with all one's poor energies to understand, except it be edgy, blurred, under suspicion. Just about everything else is hogwash, illiteracy, folderol, captivation. (I presume of course that one is standing somewhere, on behalf of human suffering.) I do not know why this is so, I am unhappy that it is so. I sense that it was the Vietnam war that brought matters to this pass. The war decade seems to me to have been a judgment scene, in which old pretensions were utterly destroyed, old suppositions derided. The official church went with the bloody tide, went down with it. That church became a pure American invention, a tool of polity, a blessing on unutterable violence. And the punishing fallout fell not merely on the Vietnamese; it fell on us, broke us apart like tinder. We staggered out of that decade scarred; the stigma of America, whose chattel we had become.

Today we are acculturated to more and more violence, spent as to spiritual energies, disoriented as to our own direction, frivolous or nostalgic as the whim takes us, ready for more degraded law and order; to inflict it, to conform to it. A leveled church indeed, in a leveling time.

Kierkegaard implies it; how hard it would be in such a time, for individuals cursed with a conscience, or determined on plain speech, or laboring under galling maltreatment, or passionate concerning the fate of others

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—how foolish for such to seek a hearing. Their cause, their presence, their gifts, are unwelcome. They are not cogs. That is their sad destiny. And if they push things, their destiny can become their crime. This is the alchemy, the witch's brew that once taken, levels our stature. Homosexuals should be content with their crepuscular status; a dark target is harder to hit. And there are worse outcomes; other societies, other times, have known how to deal with them, not in grudging toleration, but condignly.

Thus they (and we) take risks. Or we do not. We maintain a certain minimal flame of spirit—or we do not. American society, and the American church, will tolerate us as parasites, or peaceniks, or good abstract paper-pushing academics, or hapless citizens with grievances to be referred to Congress or polls or votes or bread or circuses or confession or good works. Anything, that is to say, which amounts to moral limpness, silence, the city morgue. But to speak out, to act out, to translate good intentions into sensible acts—.

In February last, I was placed in durance once more by the United States for standing at the Pentagon along with some friends. We were declaring, however symbolically and mildly, that the destruction of the world by ever bigger and newer nukes, seemed a not good idea. For dramatizing this unusual thought, I was sentenced to thirty days. As we were rounded up, I was able to slip from my wrists the plastic cuffs wherein I was held, and conceal them on my person. On release in March, I sent this folkloric device as a gift to our Father General Arrupe, who was then celebrating his golden jubilee as a Jesuit. A straightfaced letter came back in due course, thanking me. The issue I had hoped to raise, the deadly and doughy silence of American Jesuits and American Christians, with regard to the likely annihilation of all who walk the world, was of course not engaged. It is a time of leveling; one raises nothing, not the dead, not a few questions of life and death.

Dear brother John McNeill, we shall have to content ourselves with perhaps two simple acts, which I take it are nearly all we can do today. First of all, we must continue to slip the chattels and cuffs from our hands (and feet and tongues and souls). This idea is too simple to need developing. We can go along with their silencing us, we can go along to their jails; but we must do these things with all our passionate heart, for our own reasons, for our people, knowing our cause is just and worthy and speaks for all. We must not go in their direction hang dog, like dogs to their own hanging. And secondly, we must offer strange gifts to authority. The best gift I can think of is our own rebirth, our liberation. Something embarrassing, something sublime; come along, that freedom road!

ASPECTS OF ROBERT LOWELL

JOHN DRUSKA

For some, a kind of American Yeats

I. His Career

The speaker of Robert Lowell's "In the American Grain" (*History*) announces at the close of the poem

> (')I am not William Carlos Williams. He
> knew the germ on every flower, and saw
> the snake is a petty, rather pathetic creature.'

Whether or not the speaker is Lowell—the poem is a direct quote, perhaps a letter to him—the sentiment is surely his. Snakes, dragons, other biblical and/or allusive figures haunt Lowell's pages. In the early poems of *Land of Unlikeness* and *Lord Weary's Castle* he writes at his most emblematic. "No ideas but in things," Williams proclaimed. Lowell's first works, for which he was lionized by much of the critical establishment, might well be saying, "Nothing but within my ideas of things":

> . . . I fear
> That only Armageddon will suffice
> To turn the hero skating on thin ice
> When Whore and Beast and Dragon rise for air
> From allegoric waters.
>
> ("To Peter Taylor on the Feast of the Epiphany," *Lord Weary*)

The self-assurance of Lowell's poems in *Lord Weary* impressed. The difficulties they posed to be puzzled through impressed. Only a few objections have been recorded. Hayden Carruth dismissed the motifs in *Lord Weary* as lifeless tokens and many of the poems as "set pieces in a high style," a young poet's homage to his older masters; though among the purely "sententious" specimens Carruth discovered poems that include, under their "high gloss of artifice," urgent and moving autobiographical elements ("A Meaning of Robert Lowell," *Robert Lowell: A Portrait of the Artist in His Time,*

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New York 1970). And the artifice of Lowell's third volume, *The Mills of the Kavanaughs,* caused Williams to temper a favorable review:

> In his new book Robert Lowell gives us six first-rate poems of which we may well be proud. As usual he has taken the rhyme-track for his effects. We shall now have rhyme again for a while, rhymes completely missing the incentive. The rhymes are necessary to Mr. Lowell. He must, to his mind, appear to surmount them. ("In a Mood of tragedy . . .": ibid.)

Did Williams's objection to rhyme echo a bit his lament that T. S. Eliot had set back irreparably the course of poetry in an American idiom?

Just as critics have stressed Eliot's religion, which never was more than a convenience to his poetry, many have made much of Lowell's temporarily-adopted (and adapted?) Catholicism and its influence on his early poetry. In retrospect, though, Lowell's true faith appears to have been in the Western tradition, T.S. Eliot pastor, rather than in the Catholic Church, which became, for a time, the exoskeleton of his emotions, ideas and images. And the farther we follow Lowell through his career the more we see his own mind, insofar as it assimilates the history and cultures of Western civilization as well as the data of his own experience, becoming his real church. Under its vault he worships not only the occasional order its rituals conjure, but the cracks in its walls, the dissolution implicit in accepting one's self in the world as the manifest sign of poetry. Thus his titles evolve from the symbolic prominence of *Land of Unlikeness* and *Lord Weary's Castle* to the pop-tune lyric, *Day by Day.*

Wondering over the course of his poetry, Lowell says in one of his last poems ("Unwanted," *Day by Day*)

> I was surer, wasn't I, once . . .
> and had flashes when I first found
> a humor for myself in images,
> farfetched misalliance
> that made evasions a revelation?

If those first poems were evasive, they were evading an audience already tantalized. If Lowell's marriage to his emblems was far-fetched, not many seemed to have noticed. Or his revelation sufficed.

But Lowell himself, long before his nostalgia in *Day by Day,* had reacted against the lineal descendants of his highly-praised *Lord Weary* works, in commenting upon poems he had been writing in the 1950's: "Their style seemed distant, symbol-ridden and willfully difficult . . . my own poems seemed like prehistoric monsters dragged down into the bog and death by their ponderous armor." ("On Skunk Hour," *The Contemporary Poet as Artist and Critic,* Boston 1964.) Later, after Lowell closed out the 50's with *Life Studies,* which made him as popular as any legitimate poet is likely to become today, and especially after his poems of the

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1960's had accumulated in *Notebook 1967-68*, some critics saw a devolution in his poetry and enshrined *Lord Weary* as Lowell's masterwork. Others (including those for whom he became a confessional darling), and Lowell apparently came to regard *Lord Weary*'s mode as some archaic-baroque shell of the poet's past.

Between the publications of *Life Studies* and *Notebook 1967-68*, Donald Hall, writing the introduction to the Penguin *Contemporary American Poetry* (Baltimore 1962), concluded: "When he wrote *Life Studies*, Robert Lowell sent his muse to the *atelier* of William Carlos Williams (from that of Allen Tate)." To Williams's *atelier*, though, just for diction lessons. Even after the shift from "rhetorical stanzas" to "common speech" (as Hall puts it), Lowell keeps us in a world skewed by his mind's impositions, an introverted mythos, rather than in the sort of garden of realized commonplace that Williams gives us. As after his exit from Catholicism, figures of that faith (or the faith of his puritanical forebears) keep slithering through his lines, pets of the tradition he extends).

Following Lowell's break from rhetorical stanzas, his movement into freer verse forms, and his settling for a long while on blank verse sonnet-sections, he suffered less drastically from distaste for his own work. Change became a matter of shuffling lines, replacing words: rewriting became a prime writing method. Through the 60's, into the 1970's, Lowell rewrote incessantly, his poetry suggests, and the nature of this revision implies some amount of disintegration, off-centeredness in his evocations of the past, present and himself in relationship to himself—a difficulty in getting the equations right, a lack of perception. Yet it implies too Lowell's immense care for getting the poem right, his attention to focusing better, pulling his work, and so perhaps himself, together. Sometimes the changes perplex. Lines and sets of lines move from one poem to another in consecutive volumes, changing contexts as well, from historical to private or vice-versa. Lowell insists on our staying in his flux while he manipulates for us the data of history and memory in order to fix (but just momentarily?) his vision of his (our?) world. This is not Williams's *Paterson* regenerating itself beyond its designed end, but Lowell's notebook-history-life—Lowell's life become poem life, as Stephen Yenser claims—rehearsing as if unready to be apprised of its end.

In "Randall Jarrell" (*History*) Lowell has his fellow poet tell him, "You didn't write, you *re*wrote'." Lowell himself admitted to spending hours, days, choosing the proper word for a line. Farther and farther away from the devotional structures of his early poetry could Lowell hope to invest his work with any of the certainty whose lack his later poetry, as we've seen, seems on occasion to lament, in spite of his dismissing the "prehistoric monsters"?

> Those blessed structures, plot and rhyme—
> why are they no help to me now
> I want to make
> something imagined, not recalled?
> . . .
> We are poor passing facts,
> warned by that to give
> each figure in the photograph
> his living name.

From effects of stained glass to the snapshots with which Lowell ends "Epilogue," last poem of *Day by Day*, his last book.

II. His Life, His Death: His Poetry

As much as history, legend and myth overshadow Lowell's work, he remains at the center of his poems, in the context of his life, from childhood to death and caught inextricably between.

Lowell's "childhood, closer to me than what I love" ("Returning," *History*) draws him, throughout his poetry, in its direction, at times back to encounters with his parents, at other times toward a life-force in his work, as well as in others': "the supreme artist, Flaubert, was a boy before the mania for phrases dried his heart" ("Les Mots," *Notebook*).

His fascination for childhood in places recalls Jarrell's. Even some of the same yearning for a child-like love occurs, as in Jarrell's brother-sister poems, or the folk tales he used to render:

> Here nature seldom feels the hand of man,
> our alders skirmish. I flame for the one friend—
> is it always the same child or animal
> impregnable in shell or coat of thorns
> ("Long Summer," *Notebook*)

And all Lowell's visions of childhood root in his own memories of Boston during the 1920's. In "91 Revere Street," a rare piece of Lowell prose which serves as Part Two of *Life Studies* in the American edition, Lowell precisely details his family life as a child. The sketch ends with a joke, as obliquely as it began, neatly sliced. A joke, however, that aptly completes the poet's portrayal of himself. Lowell's father, in the piece, has been forced by his superior to spend nights away from home at the naval compound, and he is ribbed about this by an old Navy buddy: "I know why Young Bob is an only child."

But drawn in one direction by his childhood, Lowell is drawn even within the memories of his childhood in the other direction by death. "(A)lways inside me is the child who died," he says in "Night Sweat (*For the Union Dead*), "always inside me is his will to die—" And, Lowell avers in "Death and the Maiden" ("Circles, 19," *Notebook*), "A good ear hears its own death talking."

Death is the simple fact ("You were alive. You are

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dead.": "Alfred Corning Clark," *For the Union Dead*) that opens to the common mystery, the ultimate poet's question: " 'But tell me,/Cal, why did we live? Why do we die?' " ("Randall Jarrell," *History*). It becomes in fact part of Lowell's grim bond with his fellow poets and the source of a wry recapitulation of his career:

Ah the swift vanishing of my older
generation—the deaths, suicide, madness
of Roethke, Berryman, Jarrell and Lowell,
'the last the most discouraging of all
surviving to dissipate *Lord Weary's Castle*
and nine subsequent useful poems
in the seedy grandiloquence of *Notebook.*'
("Last Night," *History*)

Consistently through Lowell's *corpus* death supplies a haunting keynote:

Fifty-one years, how many millions gone—
. . .
. . . hear it, hear the clopping
of the hundreds of horses unstopping . . . each
hauls a coffin.
("Half a Century Gone, 5" *Notebook*)

And at an extreme death grows to an embodiment of the poet's work. In "Reading Myself" (*Notebook 1967-68*) Lowell shifts the metaphor of his work as honeycomb—"circle to circle, cell to cell,/the wax and honey of a mausoleum"—through that last image to the analogy, "this open book . . . my open coffin."

Even though his poetry virtually embalms him before our eyes, Lowell is not averse to gallows humor. Or is this the undertone of an unearthly wish?

sleep is lovely, death is better still,
not to have been born is of course the miracle.
("Heine Dying in Paris, I: Death and Morphine," *Imitations*)

Impossible miracle for the child already born into life's continuum, prey to its inevitable changes: "They say fear of death is a child's remembrance/of the first desertion." ("During a Transatlantic Call," *The Dolphin*)

Yet even while chronicling his own aging in his

ROBERT LOWELL

The Commonweal Poems

THE DEAD IN EUROPE

After the planes unloaded, we fell down
Buried together, unmarried men and women;
Not crown of thorns, not iron, not Lombard crown,
Not grilled and spindle spires pointing to heaven
Could save us. Raise us, Mother, we fell down
Here hugger-mugger in the jellied fire:
Our sacred earth in our day was our curse.

Our Mother, shall we rise on Mary's day
In Maryland, wherever corpses married
Under the rubble, bundled together? Pray
For us whom the blockbusters married and buried;
When Satan scatters us on Rising-day,
O Mother, snatch our bodies from the fire:
Our sacred earth in our day was our curse.

Mother, my bones are trembling and I hear
The earth's reverberations and the trumpet
Bleating into my shambles. Shall I bear,
(O Mary!) unmarried man and powder-puppet,
Witness to the Devil? Mary, hear
O Mary, marry earth, sea, air and fire;
Our sacred earth in our day is our curse.

Commonweal, July 12, 1946

CHRISTMAS EVE UNDER HOOKER'S STATUE

Tonight a blackout. Twenty years ago
I hung my stocking on the tree, and hell's
Serpent entwined the apple in the toe
To sting the child with knowledge. Hooker's heels
Kicking at nothing in the shifting snow,
A cannon and a cairn of cannon balls
Rusting before the blackened Statehouse, know
How the long horn of plenty broke like glass
In Hooker's gauntlets. Once I came from Mass;

Now storm-clouds shelter Christmas, once again
Mars meets his fruitless star with open arms
His heavy saber flashes with the rime,
The war-god's bronzed and empty forehead forms
Anonymous machinery from raw men;
The cannon on the Common cannot stun
The blundering butcher as he rides on Time—
The barrel clinks with holly. I am cold:
I ask for bread, my father gives me mould;

His stocking is full of stones. Santa in red
Is crowned with wizened berries. Man of war,
Where is the summer's garden? In its bed
The ancient speckled serpent will appear,
And black-eyed susan with her frizzled head.
When Chancellorsville mowed down the volunteer,
"All wars are boyish," Herman Melville said;
But we are old, our fields are running wild:
Till Christ again turn wanderer and child.

Commonweal, Oct. 11, 1946

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poems, (while indulging in the delight and detritus of his marriages), Lowell retains an adolescent élan, at least wistfulness:

> . . . it's the same for me
> at fifty as at thirteen, my childish thirst
> for the grown-ups in their open cars and girls. . . .
> ("Through the Night, 1," *Notebook 1967-68*)

Growing old he does not, perhaps, grow adult. Writing for his adolescent daughter, Lowell sees her growing "too fast apace,/too fast adult; no, not adult, mature." ("Growth," *Notebook 1967-68*) He too, perhaps, matures without calcifying.

Born and bred of good Boston stock, Lowell set out, like Yeats, to do just one thing, to write poetry well, according to Hugh B. Staples, the first critic to deal with Lowell's poetry at book-length. Equipped with the wherewithal to live, and so the leisure to write, appropriately bull-headed (skeptical indeed of Yeats's achievement; what did Yeats really accomplish, he once told Staples, aside from leaving us "about four-hundred lyrics"), Lowell became a poet, discovering in the process that "Poets die adolescents" ("Fishnet," *The Dolphin*).

Are we, in fact, to regard him as a chronic adolescent? His precocious success with *Lord Weary,* his circling through his works the last decade, writing and rewriting, self-absorbed (insecure?), so seriously cocooning himself in the orbit of his psychic concerns—America's grand adolescent laureate?

III. His Reputation

Robert Lowell's persistent *re*writing might have made us wonder at one time whether he would ever surpass the "four-hundred lyrics" he credited to Yeats. Yet today the critical writing on Lowell's position in American letters grows redundant. He has become for some a kind of American Yeats, not only bridging poetic tradition and the ragbone present, but turning out as well dramas that recast for us Classical and American myths, plays like those of the *Old Glory* trilogy that test our ancestral beliefs against our ancestors' and our own actions. In our present mood of eulogy, as in the wake of his lionization three decades ago, to evaluate Robert Lowell's work in a mode other than speculative is to attempt the common and the impossible.

What will come of the intellectual tradition that many have taken Lowell to represent? What of Robert Bly, called by some Lowell's most intransigent critic? Are his attacks on the *Kenyon Review* clique, Lowell included, and the anti-surrealist academics, along with his advocacy of "leaping poetry" (see *Leaping Poetry,* Boston 1975), part of a communist plot, or has Bly revealed the arc that will carry American poetry into its future? What of some voices who have been plainly showing us truths all along: Denise Levertov, David Ignatow, William Stafford, all poets in our world? And what do the Irish think of Yeats today anyway?

In its obituary of Robert Lowell last September 14, the Bangor (Me.) *Daily News* remarked, "James Russell Lowell, foremost American man of letters in his times, was Robert Lowell's great-grandfather. . . ." Born in 1819, James Russell Lowell died in 1891. In our time we remember too that Walt Whitman lived from 1819 to 1892.

So we might do well, at least for now, to think of Robert Lowell as a person and a poet in his own age, instead of as an idol for the ages.

While he attended Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, after a requisite year at Harvard, Robert Lowell roomed with Peter Taylor, today one of our finest storytellers. During their time under the tutelage of John Crowe Ransom (Jarrell appearing as Instructor for a year as well), Taylor, Lowell and a handful of hardy fellow-artists also survived the rigors of watching the frat-jock parades down Kenyon's famed Middle Path, where every Tuesday night's songfest included a lyrical toast to "The first of Kenyon's goodly race/. . . that great man Philander Chase." A friend who has just graduated from Kenyon assures me that not only was Philander Chase a real personage, but the parading and singing still go on along the Middle Path. As in Taylor's story of double romantic disillusionment, "1939," Lowell and his friends, reprobates all, continue to haunt Kenyon.

Lowell has written: "In truth I seem to have felt mostly the joys of living; in remembering, in recording, thanks to the gift of the Muse, it is the pain." ("Afterthought," *Notebook*)

Thanks to "1939" we see Lowell, even before he knows the harsh reality of love lost in Manhattan, in the self-consumed, self-consuming, sober attitude of the artist as youth that pervades his work, that causes us perhaps to call him a latter-day and peculiar Romantic, in this case the adolescent the father of the man:

> *We walked the country road for miles in every direction, talking every step of the way about ourselves or about our writing, or if we exhausted those two dearer subjects, we talked about whatever we were reading at the time. We read W.H. Auden and Yvor Winters and Wyndham Lewis and Joyce and Christopher Dawson. We read* The Wings of the Dove *(aloud!) and* The Cosmological Eye *and* The Last Puritan *and* In Dreams Begin Responsibilities. *(Of course, I am speaking only of books that didn't come within the range of the formal courses we were taking in the college.) On our walks through the country—never more than two or three of us together—we talked and talked, but I think none of us ever listened to anyone's talk but his own. Our talk seemed always to come to nothing. But our walking took us past the sheep farms and orchards and past some of the stone farmhouses that*

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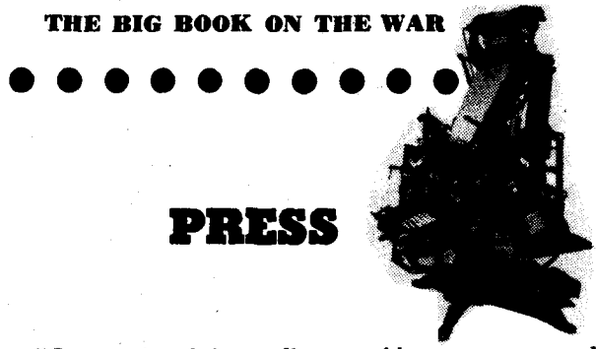
are scattered throughout that township. It brought us to the old quarry from which most of the stone for the college buildings and for the farmhouses had been taken, and brought us to Quarry Chapel, a long since deserted and 'deconsecrated' chapel, standing on a hill two miles from the college and symbolizing there the failure of Episcopalianism to take root among the Ohio countrypeople. Sometimes we walked along the railroad track through the valley at the foot of the college hill, and I remember more than once coming upon two or three tramps warming themselves by a little fire they had built or even cooking a meal over it. We would see them maybe a hundred yards ahead, and we would get close enough to hear them laughing and talking together. But as soon as they noticed us we would turn back and walk in the other direction, for we pitied them and felt that our presence was an intrusion. And yet, looking back on it, I remember how happy those tramps always seemed. And how sad and serious we were.

THE BIG BOOK ON THE WAR



"Conventional journalism could no more reveal this war than conventional firepower could win it . . ."

"Hearts and minds, People of the Republic, tumbling dominoes, maintaining the equilibrium of the Ding-dong by containing the ever-encroaching Doodah . . ."

"How do you feel when a 19-year-old kid tells you from the bottom of his heart that he's gotten too old for this kind of shit?"

Michael Herr, *Dispatches*

People were talking about it as long ago as 1969. Michael Herr was doing a book on Vietnam. Not just another book on Vietnam—there were already dozens of those—but the big book on the war people felt had to be there, waiting to be written. Journalists by legion had passed through the country; as many as 600 had been there at one time in late 1967 and early 1968. But Herr could write, his eyes had been open, his early pieces on Khe Sanh and Hue in *Esquire* in no way resembled the flat, grey reports which appeared in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. Unlike so many journalists, Herr seemed to have known from the beginning that the war was . . . *a war* . . .

Admittedly the talk of Michael Herr's book took place within a very small circle. This was not a book all America was waiting for. But within a small circle of people for whom the war had been a personal event—some had been to see it, some not—Vietnam carried the weight of a childhood trauma. There was no end of things one might say about it, in the manner of people discussing a divorce, or a falling out among friends, or a death in the family. The history and politics of the war had been settled, more or less. One might argue over details of interpretation, but details are details. The open question —open like a wound—was what it was, what it *meant*.

The talk about Michael Herr's book was not of the sort in which publishers engage. When publishers talked about the big book on the war they meant something which would land like a bombshell, major ad promo and national author's tour, Book-of-the-Month and a million dollar paperback contract, front-page review in the *Times* and a *Time* or *Newsweek* cover, all America talking and stacks a hundred high in the book section of every department store in the land. The people talking about Herr's book did not care about all that. They were not expecting a book which would finally make America Wake Up; it was too late for that; even before Nixon left office the American people had felt all they were going to feel about Vietnam; as a public event the war was *over*. The people waiting for Herr's book had something narrower in mind: something which would do justice to the war's reality, something which would capture what it was *like*.

I remember a conversation with Perry Deane Young in the early 1970s. We were at a party. He was nearly finished with a book of his own about the war, *Two of the Missing*, but there was no edge of professional competitiveness in his voice when he talked about Herr's book. He had known Herr in Vietnam, the *Esquire* pieces were the best writing about the war, period; had I seen the new section called "Illumination Rounds" which appeared in *New American Review*? I had not, but later an American journalist living in Jerusalem, John Broder—he was waiting for Herr's book, too—sent me a Xerox copy, and it was just as good as Perry had said.

But the book did not appear. It was said Herr was having trouble finishing up, that he didn't know how to end it.

"The press got all the facts . . . it got too many of them. But it never found a way to report meaningfully about death . . ."

"'Oh, two hundred isn't anything. We lost more than that in an hour on Guadalcanal.' . . . And those were

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American dead they were talking about; you should have heard them when the dead were Vietnamese."

" 'All's you got to do is look in his eyes, that's the whole fucking story right there.' . . . All I ever managed was one quick look in, and that was like looking at the floor of an ocean."

I found *Dispatches* a week or ten days ago at the Eighth Street Bookshop in New York. One copy, spine out, on the third shelf of the current events section, back against the wall. I was literally shocked. I hadn't seen any ads, had somehow missed the early review in *Publisher's Weekly*. All that time, and here it was. One copy, spine out, third shelf.

Now I haven't been working up to the arrival of Herr's book with all this portentous fanfare as if it were Haley's comet just to tell you it's no good. It's very good. Herr put his years of work to good purpose, and trumpets and cymbals would be in order if *Dispatches* were the sort of book that needed trumpets and cymbals to live, which it does not. Herr went to see the war and he *saw* it. Perhaps this sounds an odd remark; presumably all those other reporters went to see it, too. But Herr was magically blessed with eyes, with the time and freedom to look about him, and with the talent to find a way to describe what he saw. He went to Khe Sanh during the bad days of the siege, to Hue during the terrible fighting at the end of Tet, to Saigon during the battle for the Chinese section of the city in May, 1968, to fire bases and field operations all over the country. He was never wounded but nearly killed half a dozen times. He watched people dying, and saw more dead bodies than any man could ever have friends among the living. Herr went to see the war, and he saw it, and *Dispatches* is the book of a man whose eyes hurt from looking.

But the extraordinary thing about *Dispatches* is not the vividness of his description of the war as a war, vivid as it is. He spent a lot of time with soldiers in the field, and obviously vowed himself to say something of what the war was like for them, so that anyone who cared to know would have a place to look. The war used up young Americans the way a metal stamping machine uses up sheet metal. This has been remarked before, but never so well as here. The soldiers who were killed or ruined by the war still live in *Dispatches*, ghosts who cannot depart. There is no better writing about war anywhere.

But the really extraordinary thing about Herr's book is his perception that in war there are two classes: the free who can come and go, and the unfree who are *in it*. Herr was not in Vietnam long before he discovered that he was one of the free. He saw it in the eyes of the soldiers he came to write about. Sometimes they looked at him with extraordinary hatred, for choosing to share the danger when he did not have to. "You guys are crazy," one soldier told him, trying to find words for his resentment of Herr's freedom. The anger stemmed only partly from Herr's freedom to leave. That was bad enough, but worse was the fact that he chose to come. It made no difference that Herr ran an equal chance of death, ate the same food, was soaked by the same rains, slept on the same ground. The unforgivable thing was that he didn't have to.

This fact put Herr on the side of the colonels in the field, the generals in Saigon, the political leaders in Washington who started and ran and finally stopped the war for their own sweet reasons. The thing which Herr discovered was that war is fun—a sickening, exhilarating sort of fun—for those who don't have to be in it. The awful paradox is that those who have to go to war would never choose to; but as soon as they can choose they cross to the other side, and join those who are having the time of their lives. Not in a giddy, giggling, silly sort of way, necessarily, although Herr ran into plenty of such grotesques. But the time of their lives all the same. It was Herr's peculiar agony to see what the war was like for those who had to go, and yet to know that he was on the other side.

". . . but the bureaus couldn't use his story, they wanted Ambassador Komer's. And they got it, and you got it."

"I knew I hadn't seen anything until I saw his face. It was flushed and mottled and twisted like he had his face skin on inside out . . ."

" 'What the fuck do you think *happened? We got shot to pieces . . . Make that 'little pieces.' We were still shaking the trees for dog tags when we pulled back out of there.' "*

"I stood as close to them as I could without actually being one of them, and then I stood as far back as I could without leaving the planet."

There isn't going to be any big book on the war. That's already a cliché, like the Great American Novel. The war was too huge an event to be contained within a single book. Americans know next to nothing about the Vietnamese side of the war, not only the sufferings of the people in the South, but the crazy determination of the North to see it through. The war had too many stages, involved too many belligerents, lasted too long, hurt too many people in too many ways. It would be an act of arrogance to try to capture it all. If some of the people who waited for Herr's book hoped it would be the big one, well, that wasn't Herr's fault. He does not seem to have pretended to any such ambition himself.

Besides, Big Books are commercial successes, while the best books about Vietnam inevitably leave you

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feeling like hell, which is hardly the formula for commercial success. Some of the reviews I've seen of *Dispatches* have an impassioned, exhortatory quality, as if the national honor somehow depended on the number of Americans who rush out to buy Herr's book. I don't think it's going to work. There have been other good books about Vietnam and not many people bought those either—Ward Just's *To What End?* which sank almost without a trace back in the '60s; Perry Young's *Two of the Missing,* Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War,* Gloria Emerson's *Winners and Losers. Dispatches* is one of that company. Herr set out to describe certain things about Vietnam which never got into the newspapers at the time; if you read the book, you'll understand why.

THOMAS POWERS

LIBERATED LADY

THE SCREEN

Gosh, I saw a swell movie the other day, just swell. It was about this very independent and strong-willed young girl and how she makes her way in a hazardous world. Oh, I know. There are lots of movies about girls like that around these days. But this girl isn't like that Diane Keaton girl in *Looking for Mr. Goodbar.* This girl sets her sights on only one guy at a time, and doesn't let any of them take advantage of her, either, by murdering her or anything like that. She gets her kicks all right, but she always manages to give a few as well. She's not as raunchy as Diane in *Goodbar,* nor as idealistic as Vanessa Redgrave in *Julia,* nor as dedicated as Anne Bancroft in *The Turning Point.* But she's no slouch compared to those women, which is saying something when you consider that she's fifty years older than they are. The lady I'm talking about is a Ms. Clara Bow, and the movie I recently caught up with that has her in it is called *It.*

In truth, pretty, perky, saucy, *sexy* Clara Bow is still Mary Pickford—but a Mary Pickford who is now allowing a bit of her "it" to show. "It" is that certain something, that-*je-ne-sais-quoi,* which Elinor Glyn, who appears in the movie, first described in an article for *Cosmopolitan.* "It" is the Americanization of the Latin pronoun *id,* Freud's shorthand meaning the libido. In the film Clara is a sales girl at a giant department store who throws herself at the store's owner as if she were a little gold digger, and gets him! Both as a strategy for getting a man and a moral for a movie, such brazenness can succeed because Clara is not only forward, but straight-forward. She's not really brazen so much as just brash. Impulsive, quirky and absolutely bubbling over with energy, she truly is a bit of the libido let out to play; and the thoroughly modern message is clear that in this unsuppressed, unsubtle form, the libido is a rather wholesome and appealing character.

In one marvelous scene, Clara even acts out the film's revamping of the earlier ideal of the sweetheart which Mary Pickford had embodied. It's a scene where Clara is remaking an old dress to wear on the first date she has ever had to go to a night club. The dress really is something out of Mary's wardrobe, complete with one of those lace collars that looks like a doily. The marvelous part of the scene is that Clara attacks this dress with a scissors and hacks off the collar so crudely, the effect is laughable when she tries the dress on.

But after we have been disarmed by this scene where she tries to cut the dress down, imagine our surprise when the finished re-make in which she arrives at the night club turns out to be the proverbial little black dress, the one that every *femme fatale* of the thirties and forties was going to wear when she wanted to stop the show. It's not so much the fact she could wear such a scandalous dress that has floored us now, but the fact she could *make* one. We were sure she couldn't do it, with the result that when we see she can, we're so impressed we forget all about how naughty she is. Her sexiness is exceeded only by her moxie-ness, which is what keeps us off our guard with her.

It's very interesting to watch how carefully Clara preserves at least the sweet after-taste of her more demure and sheltered predecessor Mary. This it is which authenticates Clara's innocence. This assures the audience that inside the aggressiveness and desire for experience, there is still a little girl like Mary. The residue of Mary in her is what keeps "it" from running wild. Thus the only real scandal in her life comes about as a curious case of guilt by association. It is an incident that allows her to sample the true fruits of sin and depravity without actually having to stain her own character in the process.

This happens when the unwed mother whom Clara supports and provides a home for is threatened by welfare workers who want to take away her baby. Clara saves the day somehow by claiming the baby is really hers, but then this deception gets back to the store owner, who has just begun to take a shine to Clara, as if it were true. Of course, what is a moral tragedy for another girl leads to a comedy of errors with Clara, and the whole confusion is happily cleared up in the end. Things can work out this way because the truth is that for all her flirting, Clara has never allowed any man to trifle with her. She won't even let the store owner steal a kiss without getting slapped good and proper for it, and she has never had in her mind anything less than marrying the gentleman. She differs from Mary not by being immoral, but only by being ambitious.

The presence of Mary in Clara is perhaps most

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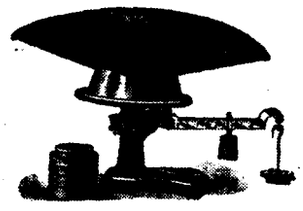
keenly felt in the scene where Clara goes to see the store owner while he's still under the impression that she is an unwed mother. She doesn't realize that this is the reason he is being stand-offish, so she turns up the heat. At one point in particular, she just flops across his desk all of a sudden, landing on her stomach with her head propped on her hands close to his face and her feet sticking up lolling in the air. This is the perfect gesture of a Mary with "it." On the one hand, such a move is an allurement, a bold play, something almost suggestive and erotic. In the context in which it occurs and with the result it has of bringing her face within kissing distance of his, it is a wanton gesture. On the other hand, though, the impulsiveness in it is impish. It's strictly a child's sort of gesture, too, like flopping on one's bed in one's own room. It's a movement full of sudden girlish exuberance of just the kind Mary always showed.

Moments like these are what leave the "it" girl's men startled and helpless, and leave the rest of us pretty delighted as well. Because she contained a share of both the innocent young things that preceded her and the steamy voluptuaries who were to follow, she is a richer characterization than either. There is a certain ambiguity in her personality that's very attractive, a certain combination of innocence and sex, a certain . . . who can say? She had "it."

COLIN L. WESTERBECK, JR.

THE WEIGHT OF A FEW WORDS

JOHN FANDEL



All I know about poetry is questions. Whatever answers I sometimes dream up, I question. Not only do I question my answers, I question my questions. Is this the right question? I question an adjective like *right* for question. Is it the right adjective? I go further. I question questioning. Sometimes I simply accept, not questioning anything, poetry least of all. But then I question my *not* questioning. And so it goes. We all know about the unexamined life, its supposed value, and we all know where that phrase came from. All of us also know the Questioner *he* was. What we may have forgotten is how his questioning, under a plane tree, led to his unquestioning drinking of the hemlock.

No question about it, I would not like hemlock. I have a going thing with life. But I like meandering under plane trees: that is, I like to question things, in spite of my questioning *questioning*. I pretend I'm walking under plane trees now, (any similarity between Socrates and me is purely poetic license), letting you listen to the questioning going on in me, the questioning that is a quest—a questing . . . one hopes not too pedestrian. *Questing* is better than *questioning*. It is a quieter word, too. You can quest the Holy Grail, for instance, without disturbing your neighbor. But to question the Holy Grail? That might lead to fisticuffs. None of that, nor hemlock. Only questing questions. I have two for a starter, two old faithfuls: *What is it? What good is it?*

What is it? is not the only way of looking at verse, or universe. Not the only way, maybe, but a natural way. *What good is it?* is just as natural, and practical besides. Whether looking at a hexameter or a galaxy, an Alexandrine or a meteor, *Adam*ant Iwantoknow and *Eve*nerup Iveamindtoo are almost bound to ask the kind of question that fiddles with things, the metronomes and telescopes of the world. This twosome comprises the kind of intelligence which wants to take Big Ben (Westclox or Westminster) apart to see what makes it tick, or bong. It is a good thing they are around, rboted right in us, constant Adam and Eve, to keep us alive to the facts of our lives, to remind us we are creatures who want to know about the makeup of our Monday world, what makes it work, so that we can snooze a little longer, a little more snugly, on Sunday morning . . . or doze, Sunday afternoons.

Poetry is part of that Monday to Sunday questing stroll through life, part of the weekday/weekend world, a tiny part of the Milky Way galaxy, a teeny part of the universe, though weightier (etymologically, *teeny* is smaller than *tiny* by *wee* which comes from *weq*, OE for weight). And *What is it? What good is it?* are as right a way to look at poetry as at that contraption we bought on *Sale* to . . . but we have forgotten why we bought it and what it is for, simply because we do not know, never did, what it is. We never understood it. There are poets

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like that, just like that, with not a sliver of an idea of what poetry is, what poetry is good for. Still they write poems that take the top of your head off. No cause for embarrassment, therefore, this blissful universal ignorance, because, accounting for every single one of them, who of the poets, proven in poems, has put down the last word on what poetry is?

Not one of them, not a blessed one. That is reassuring to me, questioning poetry and its uses— tentatively; for, as Spender said, "with poetry one is less sure than with anything else." Yet it is a carefree exercise, I think, speculating—not having to be an absolute Jove . . . Zeus . . . Jehovah . . . the kind of intelligence that need never do any guesswork about what it's all about. And when I consider what some of my fellow craftsmen have said about poetry, what it is, what it is for, I am simultaneously encouraged and nonplused. We are bold to speak our own minds when others, at the drop of a hat, uncover theirs.

How much more confident Housman makes me when he says:

> I could no more define poetry than a terrier can define a rat, but I thought we both recognized the subject by the symptoms which it provokes in us.

What a marvelous confession of wise ignorance—and unlearned knowledge! When he goes on to say:

> Experience has taught me, when I am shaving, to keep watch over my thoughts, because if a line of Poetry strays into my memory, my skin bristles so that the razor ceases to act,

I feel less defensive about my own horripilation, on reading a sonnet. How much more daring Dickinson makes me when she says of poetry:

> If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry.

What a startling touchstone! I feel less defensive about my own hair-raising reaction to a lyric, after reading that—though perhaps not quite ready to found a Scalping School of poetry . . . nor to prove poetry by Updike's Scalp Test: "I would know I had one (a poem)," he has said, "when my scalp crawled. When the skin on my head felt tight." How much less hidebound William James makes all of us in his reaction to hearing poetry:

> In listening to poetry . . . we are often surprised at the cutaneous shiver which like a sudden wave flows over us.

The Goose-Flesh School of poetry, the Cranial School, the Cutaneous Shiver School—take your pick.

I have a somewhat less heady, a little more cerebral reaction to poetry, myself; somewhat less hairy, fleshy, it still has a heart beat. I put it rather simply, I say it in four words: *Poetry lightens to enlighten.* I admit I owe Frost something for that. You know his sentence well enough to hear the echo my sentence makes. Recall his words about poetry: "it begins in delight and ends in wisdom". That is a fresh way of saying something said long before Frost. A Roman first said poetry is made to teach (*docere*) and to delight (*delectare*). And Chaucer, after Horace, had Harry Bailly decide to judge poetry on its moral teaching (*sentence*) and pleasure (*solaas*). Then why shouldn't Fandel echo what Frost echoed: *docere/delectare*; *sentence/solaas*; delight/wisdom; lighten/enlighten.

Well, there you have it, there it is, what poetry is for, its practicality, its use, my answer to *What good is it?* I agree with Robinson: poetry "is good for something or nothing." Poetry, like anything else, if it has no uses, is of no use whatsoever. No good, no practical good? Then why shelve it? Why get it by heart? Get rid of it? Our world is a glut of images; it is brimming with the inconsequential. Already there are enough sonnets, I would bet, to wallpaper every room of the many mansions in our Father's house, besides. (Perhaps the 10,000 sonnets, alone, of Dr. Merrill Moore, the prolific psychiatrist-poet who used to write a sonnet while waiting for a red light to turn green [undoubtedly with envy] would do the job.) Do we need yet one more iambic pentameter to add to the umpteen five-footers lined up on the 800 shelves, making the googol of the iambic line a googolplex? (A googol is 1 followed by 100 zeros; a googolplex is 1 followed by a googol of zeros.) So poetry multiplies, not by leaps and bounds, but by words, words, words—wordsworths . . . wordsworse's.

That pegs me as Utilitarian, capital *u*. I do not mind the label, so long as I am understood as Ulteriortarian, equally capitalized. I'm for Utility for Ulteriority. That is, I'm all for poetry being useful in the local here and the immediate now because ultimately its usefulness leads us to the ulterior good, fulfilled being, the good that is just beyond the temporary goodness, explored being. I bear witness to that *here* and *now* on the evidence of my own pulse, on the clues given by my own feeling and thinking, my own head and heart. The first thing that constant duo has told me about the use of writing poetry is this: poetry lightens me.

How poetry lightens me is what I want to be quite clear about, for myself, first of all, lucid as Hippocrene, pellucid—lightened, but not light-headed, even at 5,738 feet, the most sacred altitude, less *Paradiso*, to a poet. Lightened, I am not only unaware of my pounds when I am writing a poem, I am also unaware of my metaphysical weightlessness. Writing poetry lifts burdens off me, some as light as a laundry list, others as heavy as certain catalogues of the conscience. It lightens me of avoirdupois, the heaviness of this world which, momentarily, the mind trades off through the weight of a few words. It is the weight of a few words become a focal object (I borrow William James's borrowed terminology, probably a bit old-fashioned) that relieves me of the avoirdupois of marginal objects . . . until, of course, that marginal thing, that inconsiderate bulk, that ting-a-ling thing of mere pounds, begins to ring, and my self, lost out of myself, is brought back to identity by a wrong number.

The weight of a few words lightens me, then, as long as the focal object

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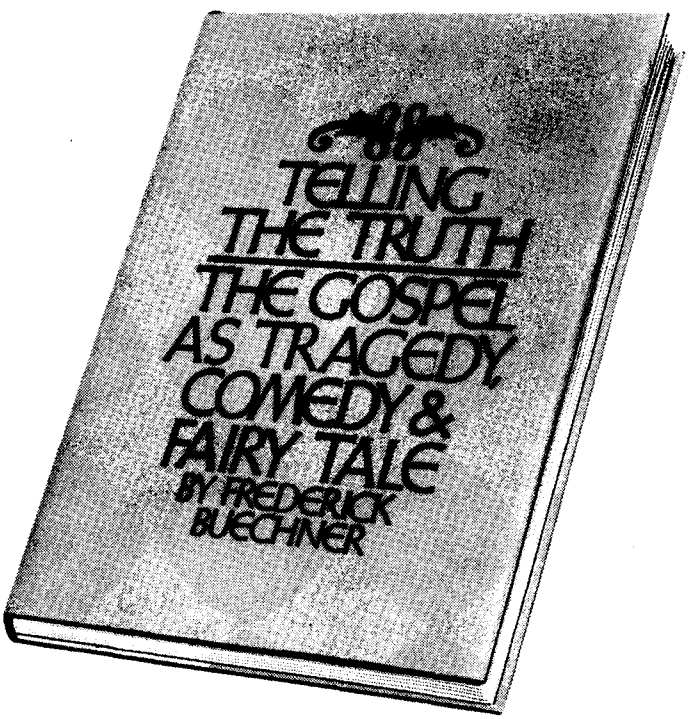
is not blurred, not intruded upon, not eclipsed by some person from Porlock —the reason for Yaddo, the McDowell and the Millay colonies; for Jeffers's hand-reared four-storey headland-boulder tower in Big Sur, if not Yeats's hand-restored three-storey brick-and-stone tower, Thoor Ballylee, in County Galway. To reduce "the heavy and the weary weight/ Of all this unintelligible world" to a few weighty words in a few moments of self-forgetting is one of the delights of Adamandeveallofus, one of the lightened states of being. Then, coming back to self, to my I.D. specifications and proportions, to my name and fingerprints, to my Social Security number, to the color of my hair, my eyes, to my bifocals, to my race and religion, to my 145 pounds, is to come back to an enlightened self. Some sort of transformation, a kind of transmogrification, however insensible, has made me in the rarest way a lighter accepter of the universe, a keener acknowledger of it, a happier viewer of the violet or the Vatican, a happier versifier of Venice or the vanishing point. I am enlightened, and the world is somewhat less unintelligible, somewhat less heavy, less of a weary weight.

The world is lighter. It is lighter because I am enlightened. I am enlightened because I am lightened, no longer an unsung Atlas. And this is the second use of writing poetry, for me: it enlightens me. But, by making a poem, arranging fifty-or-so words into a conceivable shape, what Auden calls a "verbal contraption," I am not a privileged citizen in Eastofeden. I am not, that is, a prophet with the world resolved, pat in my pocket, the free world reduced to a Liberty dime, if made into a new exchange by the coining of a poem. I am enlightened only in a remarkably limited way. I have turned a little bit of chaos into a little bit more of cosmos,—"another triumph over chaos" is how Roethke defined *poem*—and, not unlike our Father, I might look upon it to see it is good.

It might be deplorably bad, in fact, simply atrocious, horrible. It might be a new addition to the old Junk-Shop heap of dated or dilipidated Art. It might be stuff. And nonsense. But it is never worthless. It has its value, the weight of a few words, give or take 50—not a googol of them, because it is (or should be) the admirable characteristic of poetry to be succinct, to remind us of the virtue of brevity. "Poetry checks loquacity," Emerson claimed; if it doesn't, it ought to. It is the admirable characteristic of poetry to be soon over—but not done with. Like Rat, as Mole saw him, "absorbed and deaf to the world," alternately scribbling and musing, I may have therapeutic hours ahead of me fiddling with this incondite thing, this contraption of words, this thingamajig, this thingamabob, this iambic line, this poem, this lyric, this sonnet, these few words that stand for the world rehearsed, reordered, the new awareness of the old mystery.

Mystery. On this word I stop—or by this word I am stopped—to illus-

A vision of the gospel so splendidly original, only Frederick Buechner could have written it.



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trate, if not by example, the virtue of brevity, the weight of a few words. What will happen if the poem should come into another's ken, into yours, would be another lightening to enlighten—I hope. But that is not always knowable. *Mystery*. We do not even begin to give a nod of approval to the world until we have ourselves tried our hand in somehow or other shaping its intractable atoms into something we can OK. I'm not for splitting them; even a poem "ought not to be fissionable," I say with Wilbur. But our own little orders will not necessarily win a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval, or a halo. My poem may never shake a leaf off the National Laurel Tree. But there it stands, nonetheless, the unadorned proof of a wrestle and a waltz with the world.

BOOKS

Critics' Choices for Christmas

R. McAfee Brown

In *A Socio-Theology of Letting Go: The Role of a First World Church Facing Third World Peoples,* (Paulist Press, $3.95), Sister Marie Augusta Neal has produced one of the wisest and most demanding books of our time, a series of addresses whose cumulative impact touches our complacency with all the gentility of a battering ram. Affirming that "the Gospel mandates the poor to take what is theirs," and that "no right of ownership supersedes human need," she argues that "the church is called upon to support the poor as they reach out to take what is rightfully theirs."

Liberation theology being the appropriate theology for the poor, Sr. Marie Augusta suggests that the appropriate response for the non-poor is a theology of relinquishment, of diminishment, of "letting go." This is not just a matter of simplifying individual life-styles (though it can include that). It is a matter of structural diminishment. The analysis is both tough-minded and specific: "Relinquishment refers not to symbolic private acts but to public initiatives in the form of debt moratoria and the release of resources." Again, "this is a larger task than can be accomplished with private charity. It is a matter of public policy." It is also a matter of not doing things *for* the poor, but empowerment *of* the poor, since "no people can speak another's truth."

Stay away from this book if you are unwilling to face change. Read and ponder it if you are willing to face a world in process of being turned upside down—and need help.

Ronald Christ

Although the words *galaxy* and *gala* have no etymological connection, Paul West has written a novel that joins them in a verbal festivity modeled on the Milky Way.

A novelistic sequel to his autobiographical *Words for a Deaf Daughter*, *Gala* (Harper and Row, $8.95) is "the scenario of a wish-fulfillment," telling how Wight Deulius, a writer and amateur astronomer, brings his retarded daughters to the United States for a visit that they spend, along with Wight's poet companion, Pi, in building a model of the Milky Way. No substitute for the spilled milk in the sky, the model is no more a literal replica than West's novel is his wish fulfilled. Instead, both model and novel—reflexive metaphors for each other—are crafty meditations (complete with charts, drawings and analyses) on what a man can do—write, build, love—while watching himself do it at the same time. In other words, *Gala* celebrates our modern preoccupation with art about art imitating life: a celebration spangled with wit, robed in deepest frustration and melancholy, sequined with laughter that never, not for one syllable, steps out of the spotlight of West's inventive intelligence. No moonbeam, star-struck daydream this; no theoretical exercise in how to write the Novel either.

Gala outshines, outlaughs and outthinks any other novel I've read this year. It has "a passion for disharmony" as our own lives do, expressed by never forgetting the larger and smaller orders through which we glimpse that chaos. Creating a small, make-shift model in a cellar, writing a novel making itself up with only a couple of characters and a limiting situation, the writer perpetually sees the entire astronomical and literary cosmos, a word whose Greek root means harmony. West's celebration is our gala.

Harvey Cox

John Gardner calls his fellow novelist John Fowles the only author now writing in the English language whose works might one day be considered classics. I agree. Fowles's latest book, *Daniel Martin* (Little, Brown, $12.95) is a full-blown philosophical novel composed by a vastly thoughtful man who also writes extraordinarily well and can tell a story. *Daniel Martin* is an unapologetically adult book in a sense quite opposite from those allegedly "adult" movies. It requires a reader who is not afraid to listen to arguments about politics (Fowles is a socialist who reads Lukacs and Gram-

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sci), friendship, (the plot concerns a man and a woman who find each other again after twenty years apart), cinema vs. writing, religion, aging, sexuality and national character. The book also requires a reader who has lived long enough to be intrigued by its central query—what part does the past play in the present? *Daniel Martin* actually makes a philosophical case for the reinstatement of at least a modified "happy ending" to life and to history. It is the only book I have read for years which I was genuinely sorry to finish.

Ronald DeFeo

For too many years the work of René Char, one of France's foremost contemporary poets, has been unavailable in English. *Hypnos Waking,* an admirable collection by various translators, appeared in 1956, but it has been long out of print and virtually impossible to secure today (I speak from experience for I have searched high and low for a copy). Several years ago Grossman issued a translation of Char's wartime notebooks *Feuillets d'Hypnos* (*Leaves of Hypnos*) by Cid Corman, but that volume only represents a small part of the poet's work, and, alas, cannot be found at most bookshops and public libraries. Fortunately, in the last year or so, Mary Ann Caws, author of some excellent studies of the Dada and surrealist poets, has made a determined effort to rescue Char from the near-obscurity he has known in this country. Not only has she produced, together with Jonathan Griffin, this fine edition of Char in English, *Poems of René Char* (Princeton University Press, paper, $4.95), but she has also written two studies of the poet, one for Princeton, the other for the Twayne series, that are invaluable for an understanding of his work.

Like Mallarmé, Char is very much of a poet's poet, and poetry, the creative act itself, is frequently the subject of his poems. Professor Caws and Mr. Griffin have tackled a difficult task exceptionally well, given the fact that Char, again like Mallarmé, is often dense and elliptical. The intricacy of language comes across in the translation, but so does a clarity of image and the syntactical experimentation. This is a generous selection, ranging from 1927 to 1974, and includes pieces from the brilliant surrealist cycle *Le Marteau sans Maître* (three poems of which Pierre Boulez used in his landmark composition of the same name). Though the *Poems of René Char* has been available for months now, it has received surprisingly little critical attention. One only hopes that readers will discover this challenging, but enormously rewarding volume.

Daniel A. Degnan

An hour and a half south of the New Jersey Turnpike, down U.S. 301, begins the country of the Chesapeake Bay watermen, on Maryland's Eastern Shore. *Beautiful Swimmers: Watermen, Crabs and the Chesapeake Bay* (Atlantic, Little Brown, $10.95, paper $2.95), by William W. Warner, is a book about the Bay (an incredibly beautiful and interesting marine environment with 4,000 miles of shoreline), Bay boats, fishing villages, blue crabs and, especially, the watermen. The watermen work hard and dangerously, live in towns like Crisfield and Dominion, and bring their young sons out to fish with them when the weather is safe enough. Some of the watermen still dredge oysters from sailboats, Chesapeake Bay skipjacks and bugeyes. Many of them speak an English pretty much unchanged from seventeenth century England.

The blue crab is a remarkable species, a swift swimmer and savage battler, but a tender mate, requiring the whole complicated ecology of the Bay for its life. Warner's unifying theme is not only the blue crab, but the crab's environment, the endangered Bay and the men who fish it.

James Michener is reportedly writing a book on the Eastern Shore, but anyone who loves boats, the sea, history, men of work, pride and kindness, and who reads this book will know that William Warner (who works at the Smithsonian when not visiting the watermen) got there first.

Nancy Y. Hoffman

1977 was the year that, following Ibsen's Nora, I slammed the door on the doll's house of women novelists obsessed with the domestic arena, and turned to that big wide world out there where women, as well as men, must painfully address the public questions shut out of dolls' houses. Troubled by the publicity blitz and literary inadequacies of le Carré's bestselling *The Honourable Schoolboy*, I began reexamining spy thrillers as yet another paradigm for our times. The same claustrophobia, the same monomaniacal insistence on obedience, order, hierarchy—power! power! power!—reign in espionage as in domestic life. Loyalty, betrayal, deceit, political maneuver are the bread and butter of thoughtful espionage fictions—as of our lives.

Best of this year's spy stories was Charles McCarry's springtime *The Secret Lovers*, and now, in the winter of my discontent, comes Abraham Rothberg's *The Great Waltz* (Putnam, $8.95). Rothberg's new, intriguing novel counterpoints the treacheries implicit in our fidelities with the conflicting claims, private and public, sexual and political, of quiddity and allegiance. The sins of the fathers, the guilts of the sons who cannot redeem their fathers' ideals, the loss of sons and lovers who might be lifelines to the future, meld in this high-powered waltz where *Le Congrès danse, mais il ne marche pas.*

At still another "summit" conference, this time in Vienna, between Cassidy, the young American president, and Bolshakov, the aging Soviet premier, Rothberg's *ronde* trips up everyone: the novel's middle-aged protagonist, Secret-Service agent Bradshaw; his Russian "Guards" counterpart, Archipenko; Bradshaw's old friend, Austrian security officer Hartmann. All are entrusted with "keeping the peace." All

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stumble. In a triple-timing cacophony of conspiracy and vengeance, all "are not so different from us as it would seem."

Everybody loses. The old Viennese imperative, *Beigen nicht brechen*, is transmogrified into a plague of battle fatigue when, at the novel's end, Bradshaw wearily asks: "When did bending become breaking?" Rothberg handles Bradshaw's expense of spirit, his drained belief in the verities by which he has lived, far better than does le Carré with his George Smiley, as tiresome as he is tired. Rothberg's thriller is a good read, as McCarry's is, as le Carré's misty murky prose is not.

Leaving the doll's house to waltz with Rothberg is not easy (yes, I know he never promised me a rose garden), but sitting out the dance in a split-level box with a two-car garage is an abdication of responsibility. If peace, or even the semblance of peace, is to come to our troubled worlds, "small" and "great" alike, then Rothberg's *Waltz* says we must learn to step together—Americans and Russians, men and women—or we will all have to pay the piper.

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William Lanouette

Historical drama and art always mean more to us when we know something about the period and people portrayed; and the same is true for political drama. Thus, I can recommend no more intelligent way to prepare for the Senate's forthcoming debates on the Panama Canal treaties than a holiday excursion through this lively history of "the creation of the Panama Canal—1870-1914"—*The Path Between The Seas* by David McCullough (Simon and Schuster, $14.95).

But there is an even better reason to read this book: it is fun and fascinating.

In a style that blends sweeping historical trends with revealing details, McCullough portrays for our generation an era in which engineering and empire combined for heroic—though sometimes fruitless—achievement. The players include Ferdinand le Lesseps (builder of the Suez Canal), Jules Verne, Gustave Eiffel, Sen. Marcus Hanna and Secretary of State John Hay. And, of course, there's Teddy Roosevelt, behind his slapstick posturing a deeply human figure.

This saga has much pathos and dishonor, too; with sub-plots of deception, avarice, betrayal, and catastrophic disease. The story swings from the jungles of Central America to the Left Bank of Paris, to Chicago, London, New Haven, Barbados, New York, and Washington—in a narrative of splendid and sordid detail. It's a mighty tale, aptly told.

Kevin Doyle

The confines of my student budget permit me to give only paperbacks for Christmas. So, this is the first year that I can give Andrew Greeley's *Love and Play* (Seabury Press, $3.95), previously available only in hardcover.

Basically, Greeley contends that we can fully appreciate sex only when we experience it in the context of human playfulness.

And, as it turns out, Greeley *means* play in all its frivolity, competition, and naughtiness. This, Greeley says, is the most natural argument for the elements of permanency and commitment as conditions for genuine sex. The play of sex is demanding, but also "loose-grip," and hence sustainable only by the non-threatening-ness of a trustful relationship.

The notion of sex as play precludes Greeley's taking any "Joy/Job of Sex" approach. Still, Greeley coaches in his own way, and this is what really makes the book. For *Love and Play* is best of all a pep talk for everyone anywhere on the continuum of sexual inter-action. Greeley reassures us convincingly that we all go into sex cold, and that initial awarkwardness is universal. So, relax, explore and enjoy. (I almost think that Greeley is talking to the sexually insecure Studs Lonigan whom the Good Father eulogizes a few hundred books back.)

I honestly can't think of too many friends who couldn't benefit from *Love and Play*. In fact, if I gave the book to all my friends who are as shy as I can be over showing even fairly chaste signs of affection, and to all those who can understand sexual norms only as fettering, rather than humanizing, I could probably get the book at a substantial discount for volume.

Thomas LeClair

Disappearances by Howard Frank Mosher (Viking, $8.95), is a rare celebration of an endangered species, the good father. "Wild Bill" Bonhomme, a Huck Finn boy now a Faulknerian lawyer, recalls the real wild Bill, his father "Quebec Bill," a 1930's Vermont jack of all trades, innocent outlaw, and eternal optimist. Centering on the Bonhommes' three-day adventure smuggling Canadian liquor into Vermont, the novel is also an unsentimental initiation and a meditation on the disappearance of this marvelous father,

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the family whose traditions he embodied, and a way of life that created mythic fathers.

Gardner's *October Light* and Delbanco's *Possession* have recently mined the granitic Yankee. Mosher remembers the other Vermonters—the Canuck adventurers, farmers, and monks who lived in cold woods with a crazy joy. Mosher also knows how to mix comedy with moving remembrance, suspense with local lore, the authentic past with the tourist present. The Bonhommes were for a time Goodmans; the translation reminds us what they are.

A first novel, *Disappearances* may be overlooked. But one doesn't have to be named LeClair to notice—and enjoy—and admire it.

Arthur Moore

Michael Harrington is such a dependable fixture of the intellectual scene in the U.S. that he tends to be rather taken for granted or, worse, praised for his personal character (the "good old Mike" syndrome). Here—in *The Vast Majority, A Journey to the World's Poor,* (Simon and Schuster, $9.95)—is his eighth book to remind us how much more valuable than that he is. Harrington's objective is no less than to penetrate the invisible shield that keeps the American public from coming to grips with the problems of the world's poor. To do this, he alternates social analysis and personal description of his own exposure to such countries as India and Tanzania. He writes, as always, from a democratic socialist perspective but as one seeking solutions capable of adoption by this country in its present capitalist form. The mixture of styles and approaches might easily have seemed fragmented and mutually exclusive, but it works. His alternation of personal naiveté and self-examination with his social and historical analysis are more involving of the reader than either would be alone. Whether anyone can really penetrate the American national cocoon is still an open question, but this is one of our best social critics doing his damndest in the effort. We all owe him a debt of gratitude.

Dennis J. O'Brien

The purpose of this assemblage of opinion is presumably related to Christmas and to giving gifts. Having that pleasant restriction, I could hardly recommend the most illuminating book I read during the year: Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein,* (Harvard, 1973). Kenny could only be a gracious gesture to one whose mind had already been darkened considerably by the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.* Most folks probably have few friends so encumbered. Keith Ward, *The Concept of God* (St. Martin's 1974), is a very careful, sensible, yet novel book in the analytic mode on that vast topic—but still, such a gift is more likely to be received as a New Year's task than a Christmas beneficence. I decided on a choice when I received my 34th third-class mail order gift catalogue of the month which—like many others—welcomed me to "the Magic World of Someplace or other." That's it! Magic is the proper Christmas offering—but it won't come mail-order on a Master Charge.

The Earthsea Trilogy by Ursula K. LeGuin (Bantam, $5.25) presents a world of realized magic. It is easy enough to wheel in the mechanisms of magic—charms and spells, sorcerers and dragons—it is another thing to make us believe in such a world. Ursula LeGuin's special gift is making magic real and important. The arch-mage Sparrowhawk's power rests on a world view that we still dimly perceive and would wish to validate. The secret of magic in Earthsea lies in names. Dragons who speak in the old tongues know the true names of things, and the art of the mage lies in the names which give power. The world view of Earthsea is pre-modern, a world in which the powers of the earth could be *summoned.* To name a thing is only sensible if there lies deep down a core of spirit that can be called upon as we summon the person by invoking a proper name. In archaic and even classical cultures the world was full of gods, spirits, daimons, muses who dwelt in sea and air, in sex and science. The arts and commerce both high and low lived in and through the invocation of these spirits. The world was there to be summoned by a name.

The journey to modernity can be seen as the loss of names, the inability to summon any spirit at the core of the things and events. The old *powers* are still there, but they are now regarded as nameless, impersonal forces which master us and resist being called by name. In the second (and to my mind, best) of the volumes in the Trilogy, *The Tombs of Atuan,* the basic conflict is between the mage and the priestess of The Nameless Ones who dwell in eternal darkness. The strength of Ursula LeGuin's writing is to make us feel the spiritual struggle between a world to be summoned and a world of nameless power. In that dimension it is more than fairy tale and fantasy.

Robert Phillips

If I were to give one new book to a "literary" friend this Christmas, it would be James Atlas's *Delmore Schwartz: The Life of an American Poet* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, $15). Richly illustrated with photos, exhaustive without being exhausting—unlike Unterecker's *Hart Crane,* for instance—Atlas's critical biography brings to life that larger-than-life author of *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities,* who proclaimed himself "the poet of the Atlantic migration, that made America." Along the way Atlas deals with Delmore's (no one called him Schwartz) friends, colleagues, and correspondents—among them R.P. Blackmur and James Laughlin, Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens, John Berryman and Robert Lowell.

In addition to assessing all of Delmore's published poetry, fiction and criticism, in a manner which by-and-

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large seems fair, twenty-eight-year-old Atlas, whose first book this is, has read everything Delmore left in manuscript as well—including all the marginalia in all the books he was known to own. Since Delmore was a creative reader, the insights to be gained by the method are hardly marginal.

One expects some errors of fact in such a large book, and one meets them: Frank Piskor of Syracuse is called "President of the University" where Delmore last taught; the man holding that office was William Pearson Tolley, though the title was Chancellor, not President. (Piskor was Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs.) Moreover, Horace Gregory was not sole author of "his" *History of American Poetry*, 1900-1940. (It was co-authored by his wife, Marya Zaturenska.) Etc.

Such points are eyebrow combing, however. What if anything is wrong with the book is the absence of a concerted attempt to be precise about the cause for and diagnosis of Delmore's mental disorder(s). When it comes to these matters, Atlas shrugs. Nevertheless, this is a readable, fascinating and important study of a poet in our time, and one of the best books of the year.

Kirkpatrick Sale

"It is said that the history of peoples who have a history is the history of class struggle. It might be said with at least as much truthfulness, that the history of peoples without history is the history of their struggle against the State."

Thus the striking conclusion of *Society Against The State*, by Pierre Clastres (Urizen Books, $12.95). The distinguished French ethnologist has made an extensive study of the Indians of the Americas; that archaic, or "primitive," societies—without writing and therefore "without history"—not only do *not* have a political state, or hierarchies, or powerful chieftains, but actually organize their society so as to prevent the emergence of one.

Fantastic as it may seem to state-bound Westerners who can imagine no other way that societies might work, Clastres proves that the general mode among Indian cultures—and, he would argue, archaic cultures elsewhere in the world—is, to put it in a word he shies from using, anarchistic, literally without a state. Far from being the stuff of utopian dreams, in other words, anarchism may represent humankind's earliest and most enduring form of organization, albeit for relatively small and simpler societies.

Important as this work is as a contribution to anthropology, I think ultimately its greatest contribution will be to political philosophy, particularly for those exploring alternatives to modern giantism. It is that, at any rate, which has made it such a forceful, I might even say haunting, work for me.

Urizen Books, incidentally, the publisher of this book in the U.S., is a two-year-old cooperative venture which shares its profits with its authors and is quite deserving of support.

John P. Sisk

This little book—*Shame, Exposure, and Privacy*, by Carl D. Schneider. (Beacon, $9.95)—about the personal, social, and religious significance of the sense of shame is intended to counter the absurdities and excesses that have resulted from our peculiar and immodest combination of secularism, narcissism, and honesty. Our rejection of shame, Professor Schneider believes, "is rooted in our faith commitment to reason, science, and self-realization" and expresses our misguided belief that human liberation demands an uncompromising stand against custom, tradition, and the communal involvement that, paradoxically, makes privacy and personhood possible. Entrapped in our rituals of shamelessness, and driven as we are by our compulsion to strip aside all veils and violate all sanctuaries, we suffer from a collapse of the dialectic of covering and uncovering, so that we "value only disclosure, demythologizing, unmasking."

Brief though this book is, it is still wonderfully inclusive as it ranges over primitive, Classical and Judaic cultures. Schneider delineates important differences between the Old and New Testament—contrasting the awe and reticence of the former before the holy with the new boldness of the latter. He is also very good on the shamelessness of psychoanalysis (see his treatment of Freud's famous "Dora" case, for instance), and on the reasons for the rejection of our bond with the Other. He helps us see this rejection as an anti-theology of shame in which Nietzsche and Sartre are the supreme anti-theologians.

Mark Taylor

Our real knowledge of combat in the Great War perforce depends upon primary sources, the accounts of its soldiers, but soon after the first books (memoirs, letters, novels, etc.) began to appear in late 1915, Jean Norton Cru, who fought at Verdun and elsewhere, detected extraordinary inconsistencies and contradictions both among the various accounts and between most of them and his own experiences. With that crusading passion that many survivors of the War brought to the effort to find the truth and to get it down, and with the conviction that what was barely possible in the 1920s would, if the chance were not then seized, be impossible later on, Cru undertook the monumental labor of reading over 300 volumes of allegedly firsthand experiences, commenting extensively on each, and thereby extracting from masses of fallacies or distorted commentary a "sketch of the war according to a few good witnesses." That some of the witnesses were good he determined, first of all, by examining the official war records of all the authors to ascertain whether those who appeared to speak with authority of a given battle were in fact in it. The result of his industry was *Témoins* (*Witnesses*), a book of over 700 large pages, published in 1929; *Du Témoignage* (*Testimony*), a greatly reduced version of *Témoins* brought out by Gallimard two years later; and *War Books: A*

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Study in Historical Criticism, Cru's own translation of *Du Témoignage* only now published for the first time (San Diego State University Press, paperback, $5.00). Cru died in 1949.

I hope this book will be widely read for what it has to tell about the elusiveness of truth, but if it is, it surely will not provoke the controversy it raised in France nearly fifty years ago. For the novels from the war, then in vogue, Cru had little use. The novelist was a slave to his culture and its *a priori* forms; he was "haunted by literary modes and methods, the desire to get effects, and otherwise obsessed by legends whose spell he had been unable to cast off. To see the truth of war requires eyes which are new and fresh. . . ." Cru felt it a great personal advantage to have grown up an island near New Caledonia, to have known the sort of innocent childhood celebrated over a century earlier by Bernardin de St. Pierre.

The war novelist, moreover, tried to serve two opposed masters: art and truth. In Remarque and Barbusse, to name the most familiar, Cru found virtually no documentary value, only, in the former, "something which bears too great a resemblance to a purely advertising statement." In Barbusse he read descriptions of "a cold mass of dead bodies" in a trench and "a sheet of bright red blood" flowing across a battlefield; but bodies did not fall in masses, and the blood of the slain did not flow in sheets or streams, or erupt in fountains—though, Cru noted, poets and novelists had been saying so ever since Homer. Other modes of discourse were not necessarily more satisfactory than novels. Most collections of letters, for example, were posthumous, and though their authors had known what was going on, the parents and friends who edited and arranged them didn't. Cru was villified by militants and pacifists alike, the right and the left, for truth mutually unpleasing. Armies, he said, just did not attack in close ranks across no man's land; to some the notion that they did was glorious; to others the notion that their commanders would order something so stupid was equally glorious.

Margaret Wimsatt

Anthony Hecht's poetry belongs to a tradition not much practiced today in which the poet, acknowledging his forebears and his debt to the genius of the language, transmutes and transforms it to his own purposes, in gratitude, not rage. A Pulitzer Prize winner, the holder of numerous fellowships and chairs, the translator (with Helen Bacon) of Aeschylus's *Seven Against Thebes*, Hecht now publishes his third collection of verse, *Millions of Strange Shadows* by Anthony Hecht (Atheneum $7.95). Light and serious themes intermingle; complicated rhyme schemes alternate with elegant couplets or free verse. The poems are such entities that it is not easy to extract a brief quotation. Perhaps these lines from "Exile: for Joseph Brodsky" will suggest his tone of voice.

this sullen place
Is *terra deserta*, Joseph, this is Egypt. . . .
This is Egypt, Joseph, the old school of the soul.
You will recognize the rank smell of a stable
And the soft patience in a donkey's eyes,
Telling you are welcome and at home.

Each poem in this book has its own separate pleasure for the reader, but perhaps the most compelling for us of the Judaeo-Christian tradition is called "Gladness of the Best," the "deftly braided song/ In which each separate voice/ seems to discover where it should belong."

CRITICS

ROBERT MCAFEE BROWN is a member of the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in Manhattan.

RONALD CHRIST is Editor of *Review*, published by the Center for Inter-American Relations.

HARVEY COX's most recent book is *Turning East* (Simon & Schuster).

RONALD DE FEO writes for *The National Review, The Nation* and other journals

FATHER DANIEL A. DEGNAN, S.J., is Academic Vice-President at Loyola College in Baltimore.

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WILLIAM J. LANOUETTE is covering the Panama treaties as a Staff Correspondent for *National Journal*.

KEVIN DOYLE is a Fordham student serving an internship at *Commonweal*.

THOMAS LECLAIR teaches in the English Department at the University of Cincinnati.

ARTHUR MOORE edits *New World Outlook*, missionary magazine of The United Methodist Church and the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

DENNIS J. O'BRIEN is President of Bucknell University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Hegel on Reason and History* (U. of Chicago Press).

ROBERT PHILLIPS's Lewis Carroll study, *Aspects of Alice*, has just been reissued as a Vintage paperback.

KIRKPATRICK SALE is the author of *SDS* and *Power Shift* (Random House).

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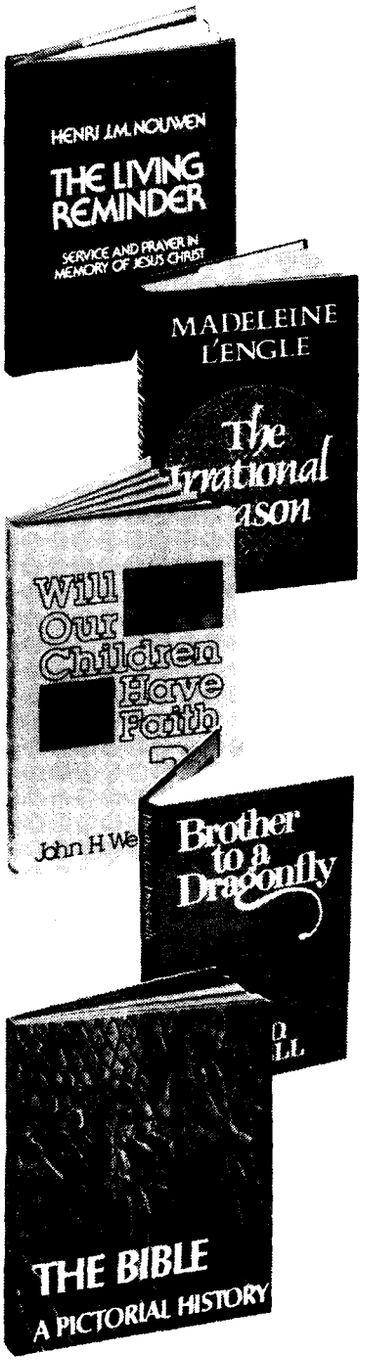

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